Dr. Ferghal Armstrong
Group Psychoeducation
FRACGP, FAChAM, FASLM, MATOD Trainer

Meeting Minutes:

Date: 13/04/2026

Location: Group session

SLEEP HYGIENE AND INSOMNIA MANAGEMENT

Why This Matters (Recovery Context)
Poor sleep quality significantly impacts recovery from addiction
Sleep disturbances can trigger relapse through increased stress and cravings
Medication-based sleep solutions often disrupt natural sleep architecture
Establishing healthy sleep patterns supports overall recovery goals

What's Happening in the Brain and Body
Sleep latency: Normal time to fall asleep is approximately 30 minutes
Body temperature follows circadian rhythm (highest at 4pm, lowest at 4am)
Cortisol peaks at 8am and reaches its lowest point at 8pm
Cortisol awakening response mobilises energy stores upon waking
Melatonin production is suppressed by blue light exposure

The Addiction Lens
Sleep medications (benzodiazepines and Z-drugs) reduce sleep latency by up to 30 minutes but disrupt REM sleep and slow wave sleep
Stimulants (caffeine, nicotine) interfere with sleep quality and can perpetuate addiction cycles
Alcohol negatively impacts heart rate variability and sleep architecture
One alcoholic drink increases heart rate by 3 beats per minute and reduces heart rate variability by 7 milliseconds

Core Model or Framework
Morning routine establishes circadian rhythm
Evening wind-down prepares body for sleep
Sleep efficiency (time asleep divided by time in bed) should be 90-95%
Environmental factors (light, temperature, stimulants) significantly impact sleep quality

What This Looks Like in Real Life
Morning sky gazing within 3 hours of waking entrains circadian rhythm
Cold morning showers raise core body temperature through paradoxical thermic effect
Warm evening baths/showers help lower core body temperature
Bedroom temperature between 15-19°C optimises sleep
Temperatures above 24°C disrupt heart rate variability and parasympathetic tone

Practical Strategies for Recovery
Morning routine:
Wake at same time daily (including weekends)
Morning sky gazing (without sunglasses) for 20 minutes

Morning exercise to raise body temperature
Cold shower to increase core body temperature

Evening routine:
Avoid screens 3 hours before bed (blue light suppresses melatonin)
Use red/yellow lighting in evening
Consume carbohydrate-rich meal 1-4 hours before bed (increases tryptophan)
Warm shower/bath to lower core body temperature
Sleep in completely darkened room

Stimulant management:
Avoid caffeine, nicotine after midday
No alcohol in system when attempting to sleep
Consider eliminating all stimulants if experiencing anxiety or insomnia

Common Pitfalls
Using "nightcaps" (alcohol) to induce sleep
Screen use before bed disrupting melatonin production
Exercising too close to bedtime
Inconsistent wake times (especially weekends)
Relying on medications that disrupt sleep architecture

Key Take-Home Messages
Good sleep depends on good wake-up routine
Natural light exposure is critical for circadian rhythm
Sleep medications disrupt natural sleep architecture
CBT-I (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia) is the most evidence-based intervention
Free camping (without electricity) can reset circadian rhythm within 48 hours

Reflection Questions
How might your current morning routine be affecting your sleep quality?
Which sleep hygiene practices could you implement immediately?
How might improving your sleep quality support your recovery journey?