



Synopsis

The clinical and cost-effectiveness of improving sleep via carer delivered strategies in people with dementia: the DREAMS START parallel multi-centre RCT

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Plain language summary

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Why did we do this study?

Many people with dementia have disturbed sleep, which is distressing for them and their family, yet there are no proven safe and effective treatments. To address this gap, we developed Dementia RElAted Manual for Sleep; STrAtegies for RelAtives (DREAMS START), a six-session intervention. People without clinical training deliver DREAMS START individually to family carers. It uses strategies like increasing light, activity, comfort, routine and relaxation; adapted for each person. We wanted to know: 'Do people with dementia living at home sleep better 8 months after receiving DREAMS START compared to people who did not receive it?' We also wanted to see if it is good value and how it works.

What did we do?

We tested DREAMS START in a trial across 12 English National Health Service sites. Between February 2021 and March 2023, 377 pairs of people with dementia and family carers took part. Half were offered DREAMS START plus usual care and half just usual care. We asked about the person with dementia and carers' sleep, their quality of life and carer mood at the start and after 4 and 8 months. We measured costs of DREAMS START and compared services used between the groups.

What did we find?

People with dementia whose carers received DREAMS START alongside usual care had better sleep than those who just had usual care after 8 months. We found that family carers who had DREAMS START reported better sleep and less anxiety than those who did not. Health and care services used by people with dementia and carers receiving DREAMS START cost £116 less per person than those who just had usual care.

What does this mean?

DREAMS START is a safe and effective treatment of sleep in dementia; it benefits family carers with potential to save money.