

Tips for a better night's sleep

Carl W. Bazil, M.D., Ph.D.

General:

1. Go to sleep at about the same time each night, and awaken at the same time each morning. Wide fluctuations between workdays and days off can further impair your sleep.
2. Try not to nap. If you do, restrict this to about an hour per day, and do it relatively early (before about 4 in the afternoon).
3. If you are not sleepy, either don't go to bed or arise from bed. Do quiet, relaxing activities until you feel sleep, then return to bed.
4. Avoid doing stimulating, frustrating, or anxiety provoking activities in the bed or in the bedroom (watching television, studying, balancing the checkbook, etc). Try to reserve the bedroom and especially the bed, for sleep and sexual activity.

Use of drugs

1. Avoid coffee, tea, cola or other caffeinated beverages after about noon. Also avoid chocolate late in the day.
2. If you smoke, avoid this in the hour or two before bedtime.
3. If you drink alcohol, limit this to 1-2 drinks per day and do not drink immediately before bedtime. Although you may find this relaxing, alcohol actually can interfere with sleep later in the night.
4. If you take prescription drugs or over-the-counter drugs that can be stimulating, discuss dosing times with your doctor

Exercise

1. Exercise, particularly aerobic exercise, is good for both sleep and overall health and should be encouraged
2. Avoid stimulating exercise in the evening (do this at least 5 hours before bedtime)

Bedtime ritual

1. Perform relaxing activities in the hour before bedtime
2. Make sure your sleeping environment is as comfortable as possible, paying attention to temperature, noise, and light
3. Do not eat a heavy meal just before bedtime, although a light snack might help induce drowsiness
4. It is sometimes helpful to place paper and pen by the bedside. If you find yourself worrying about completing or remembering a task the next day, write it down and let it go.

During the night

1. If you awaken and find you can't get back to sleep, arise from bed and do quiet, relaxing activities until you are drowsy. Then return to bed.
2. Place clocks so that the time is not visible from the bed.

For further information and help:

www.columbiasleep.org

www.sleepfoundation.org

<http://www.hypnos.co.uk/hypnomag/jacobson.htm> (stress reduction techniques)

online insomnia treatment : shuti.me

online self hypnosis : hemi-sync.com

<http://www.clevelandclinicwellness.com/Programs/Pages/Sleep.aspx>

Online program to help improve sleep for those with insomnia

www.justgetflux.com

Software that removes blue light from the computer screen

www.lowbluelights.com

A company specializing in reducing blue light with equipment such as glasses and computer screen filters

www.sunbox.com

A company specializing in lightboxes

www.northernlighttechnologies.com

A company specializing in lightboxes

Snoring therapy : www.theravent.com or 1-855-265-7667

smartphone apps :

iSleepEasy

Calm

Simply Being

Mindfulness Meditation

Universal Breathing

Pzizz Sleep

Mayo Clinic Insomnia Wellness Solutions

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES FOR INSOMNIACS

Anne Helena Remmes, M. D.

If tomorrow is a very important day and you need to be at your best so you **MUST** get a good night's sleep and you're worried about it and you have guests coming on the weekend and your mother's going into the hospital for surgery and you don't know how you will get to the hospital to visit her and you keep waking in the middle of the night with the most exciting ideas about a project and just can't get back to sleep and have meeting with your boss about your productivity and ...and ... you just can't face another day of being so sleep deprived!...then read this.

TRYING to get to sleep with a head full of thoughts will often be unsuccessful. Ten to twenty minutes of TRYING to sleep but without success increases your level of frustration and anxiety and simply pushes sleep farther away. The harder and longer you try the more awake you become. The onset of sleep is a reflex, or involuntary, process, it cannot be forced.

These relaxation techniques are not intended to take the place of the behavioral techniques and/or medications discussed with you during our office visit. They are only to provide you with an additional element of control over your very active analytical brain.

“Active” relaxation techniques can help prevent you from trying so hard to get to sleep by focusing your thoughts on the feelings of your body relaxing. “Passive” techniques focus your thought on internal quiet images. Try each to see which is most comfortable and effective for you.

It is most useful to practice these techniques before you need them for sleep so you don't have to sit up, turn the light on and read the next instruction just as your body is relaxing and your mind is becoming calm! They are pretty straightforward and it won't take very long to feel quite comfortable using them.

Remember that your current sleep habits may have developed over a long period of time.

It will take time to change them.

SECONDARY TECHNIQUES

DEEP BREATHING:

1. Take a deep, relaxing, “cleansing” breath.
2. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Concentrate on making each breath flow smoothly in and out of your body.
3. Think about nothing but your breath as it flows in and out.
4. Say to yourself. “I am relaxing. Fresh air is flowing into my lungs and stale air is flowing out with each breath. I feel calm and refreshed. “
5. Continue to focus on your breathing, feeling the smooth natural rhythm of your involuntary brain working to provide you with oxygen.
6. Each time your breath flows out, feel it drawing tension with it. Feel the tension in your body decreasing with each breath.

When you feel your body and mind are relaxing, you may continue with this exercise, or choose to go on to the next. If you choose to go on, first take a deep, “cleansing” breath and relax for a moment. Do not let anything intrude on the concentration on your relaxation.

TENSING THE MUSCLES: (about 20 seconds each step)

1. Take a deep, cleansing breath. Remember to think only of your body feelings, and not allow stray thoughts to enter on a conscious level.
2. Tense your toes and feet (curl the toes, turn feet in and out). Hold the tension, study the feeling, then relax your toes and feet.
3. Tense your lower legs, knees and thighs. Hold, then study the feeling. Relax the muscles.
4. Tense your buttocks. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
5. Tense your fingers and hands. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
6. Tense your lower arms. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
7. Tense your abdomen. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
8. Tense your stomach. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
9. Tense your chest. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
10. Tense your lower back. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
11. Tense your upper back. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
12. Tense your shoulder. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
13. Tense your neck, in the front then the back. Hold, study the feeling, then relax.
14. Tense your entire head. Feel the tension particularly in the back of your head and your forehead. Make a grimace so you can feel the tension on all the muscles of your face. Hold, study the feeling, and relax.
15. Now tense all the muscles of your body. Hold the full body tension for several seconds, study the feeling, then relax.
16. Continue to relax for a few moments, feeling the sense of relaxation flow through your body. Feel the difference between muscles which are relaxed and those

which are tense. Identify which muscles in your body feel sore or tight when you go through the tensing process. Take a deep breath and stretch your body like a cat.

DEEP BREATHING:

Repeat the deep breathing exercise. Try to slow your breathing to 10-12 breaths each minute (about 3 seconds to inhale and 4 seconds to exhale).

NUMBER COUNT DOWN:

1. Take three slow, deep, cleansing, breaths. Each time, while exhaling slowly, visualize the “3”. “3” is your symbol for complete body relaxation.
2. Relax any tension in your body. Remembering the state of deep relaxation you felt after the muscle tensing exercise.
3. Repeat to yourself. “3: complete body relaxation.”
4. Take three more deep breaths. Each time, while exhaling slowly, visualize the number “2”. “2” is your symbol for complete brain and nervous system relaxation.
5. Relax all thought processes, feeling a sense of mental stillness and harmony.
6. Mentally repeat: “2: complete brain and nervous system relaxation.”
7. Take three more deep breaths. Each time, while exhaling slowly, visualize the number “1”. “1” is your symbol for complete oneness within yourself in complete mind-body attunement and harmony, without conflict.
8. Mentally repeat: “1: complete mind-body harmony.”
9. In this deep state of mind-body relaxation you are filled with calm and peaceful. Feel the calm within, and concentrate on the stillness.

DEEP BREATHING:

Repeat the deep breathing exercise.

Continue to rotate through these exercises for 20 to 30 minutes. If you have not fallen asleep within 30 minutes, get out of bed and read until you feel sleepy. Do not allow yourself to think about, or worry about, falling asleep. Return to bed when you are sleepy and repeat the exercises.

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION (modified from Medicinenet.com)

1. While inhaling, contract one muscle group (start with your forehead or your toes) for five to ten seconds. As you exhale suddenly release the tension in that muscle group.
2. Take 10- 20 seconds to relax, then move on to the next muscle group, slowly ascending or descending your body. While releasing the tension, try to focus on the changes you feel when the muscle group is relaxed.
3. Imagery may be helpful in conjunction with the release of tension, such as imagining that stressful feelings are flowing out of your body as you relax each muscle group.

PRIMARY TECHNIQUES

If concentration on body relaxation alone is not sufficient to allow you to sleep, you may add one of the following exercises as a 4th step once your body is relaxed. It is a simple method of thought management, allowing you to abort or eliminate any thought, good or bad, about you or your life. This exercise is difficult because it is primary process of thought control, in contrast to the previous techniques which allow your mind to relax as you focus on your body. While you are doing the exercises quickly release any extraneous thoughts by taking a deep breathe and refocusing.

A. TRANSPORT TO A PEACEFUL ENVIROMENT:

1. Take a deep, cleansing breath.
2. Think about a place you may have been, or that you can imagine, that represents your ideal place for mental and physical relaxation, It should be a quiet environment, perhaps the seashore, the mountains, or even your own backyard.
3. Now, imagine you are actually in this ideal relaxation place. Imagine you are seeing all the colors, hearing all the sounds, smelling the fragrances. Just lie back and enjoy this soothing, rejuvenating experience.
4. Feel the peace, the calm, and imagine your body and mind being renewed and refreshed.

B. BLACK VELVET:

1. Take a deep, cleansing breath.

2. Imagine a very large piece of exquisite black velvet, so large you cannot see the edges.
3. Focus on keeping only that piece of velvet in your consciousness. Do not allow any thoughts to creep in do not allow any lint or wrinkles to distort the surface of the fabric. Imagine the feel of the fabric on your skin; experience its softness and texture.

C. SURFACE OF A LAKE:

1. Take a deep, cleansing breath.
2. Imagine the surface of a very large lake. There are no boundaries to the lake. You cannot see any trees, sky, clouds, fish jumping. You can only see the surface of the water.
3. Concentrate on keeping the surface of the water mirror smooth. Do not allow ripples of currents to disturb the smooth surface. Do not allow fish to jump, bugs to fly, or wind to whistle.

D. CANDLE LIGHT:

1. Take a deep, cleansing breath.
2. Visualize a candle sitting in a dark room. Focus on the flame of the candle.
3. Keep the flame quiet and bright, with all the light concentrated in the flame, without a halo or rays emanating from it.