

# SIMPLE SLEEP STRATEGIES

IDEAS TO HELP YOU REST RELAX AND RECHARGE



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# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

We all know how important it is to get a good night's sleep but it is one of the first things that seems to elude us during times of stress.

You may feel very tired but as soon as your head hits the pillow your brain seems to wake up and you dwell on the day and worry about all manner of things both past, present and future.

When your job involves helping other people who are in stressful or distressing circumstances, you add their problems to your own which just makes things worse. I know that I have spent many nights thinking about my patients and second-guessing my own judgement.

But it's a vicious cycle - the less sleep we get the more stressed we become making it harder to sleep!

In this book I have put together some simple ideas and strategies for you to try when you are finding it difficult to fall asleep, stay asleep or waking early.

I use these myself and have taken advice from experts in their field so please give them a try and see if any work for you. Remember that giving yourself time and space to relax is absolutely essential if you want to stay emotionally and physically fit enough to do the job you love.

Jayne





**WHY DO WE NEED TO  
SLEEP?**



**"Sleep is  
that golden chain  
that ties health and our bodies together"**

Thomas Dekker

Although it is something every living creature does, scientists are still not entirely sure why it is necessary. However, studies have proved that even being mildly sleep deprived affects our cognitive ability, central nervous system and immunity to disease.

Ideally, we should sleep for about 7-8 hours a night and teenagers need to sleep for longer - around 9-10 hours. The average person will spend 26 years asleep in their lifetime! They will also spend about 7 years trying to fall asleep!

In the past people valued sleep and understood its importance for their welfare but in today's 24/7 fast-paced world many people view it as an inconvenience and try to avoid it!

Sleep is vital for all of the bodies functions including the consolidation of memories, restoration and rejuvenation of tissues, production and regulation of hormones and strengthening of the immune system.



**WHAT STOPS US  
SLEEPING?**



### **"The best cure for insomnia is to get a lot of sleep" – W. C. Fields**

When our body reacts to a stimulus we perceive as a threat, it initiates the flight or fight response to keep us safe. This response is initiated by both real and perceived threats so when your job involves witnessing others in distress this response happens on a daily basis and its effects are cumulative and relentless.

Short term, this stress response is useful and motivates us, but long term the effects are negative and affects our ability to sleep; you will find it difficult to relax and experience anxiety which keeps your thoughts racing and going over the day's events.

#### **Food and Drink**

What you eat and drink has a profound effect on your mood and also on your sleep. Eating rapid acting carbohydrates or spicy foods too close to bed time will make it difficult to fall asleep as they can raise blood sugar or cause digestive problems such as heartburn.

If you have to eat before bed, as you are on long shifts, limit carbohydrates and consider including foods that contain the amino acid tryptophan which is found in turkey, eggs and dairy food.

Likewise snacking on nuts and seeds high in magnesium can act as a natural sedative instead of crisps or sweets which will raise blood glucose and increase feelings of anxiety.

Caffeine affects your sleep so try to stop all sources of caffeine for about 10 hours before you go to sleep. Alcohol is a stimulant which, although it can make you initially feel sleepy, disrupts the second part of your sleep cycle leaving you feeling fatigued when you wake, Nicotine does the same thing.

#### **Environment**

The environment you are sleeping in also has a profound effect on your ability to fall asleep. You need to feel safe, which is why it's often hard to fall asleep in a hotel room. You need to be comfortable with a good mattress and pillows.

The room needs to be dark and with no TV screens or mobile phones as these can stop you from falling asleep. If you need to use an alarm, don't use your mobile phone, use a normal clock.

The temperature of the room is also crucial - the cooler the better! Another trick is to have a bath or shower before bed as the process of the body cooling helps initiate sleep.

# BREATHING TECHNIQUES







It seems so obvious but becoming aware of your breathing can really help you alleviate stress and aid sleep. This is because when you breathe deeply using this diaphragmatic technique it activates your vagus nerve which helps your body go from the flight and fight response to rest and relax. Just 10 minutes will help. However if you have high blood pressure or any kind of respiratory conditions such as asthma you should check with your Doctor before doing any of these breathing techniques.

**There are a few different techniques you can try**

### **Diaphragmatic – Belly Breathing**

- Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your upper chest level with your sternum. You can do this either sitting up or lying down on your back with a pillow under your knees
- As you breathe in push your stomach out and count to 4
- Pause
- Slowly breath out through your nose and count to 9
- Try to practice this for about 5 mins initially and work up to 10 mins

**Practising this technique when you are in bed will help you fall asleep but you can also use it to help you calm down during the day**



## **4-7-8 Breathing Technique**

Take a few minutes to get comfortable, close your eyes and relax your body

Allow your breathing to become even and regular

Try to free your mind and if you do begin to think about something let the thoughts come and then let them float away, don't dwell on them

With each inhale imagine you are drawing in light, let the light fill you up from the tip of your head to the tips of your toes. Allow yourself to bathe in this light and feel the warmth of it all over your body.

Slowly breathe in and out and feel yourself becoming more peaceful and centered

Next, close your mouth and inhale through your nose for the count of 4, hold your breathe for the count of 7 then exhale through your mouth making a 'woosh' sound as you breathe out for the count of 8.

Do this 2-3 more times - no more than this as it can make you a little lightheaded



### **Alternate Nostril Breathing**

- Sit comfortably, up straight, relax your jaw and breathe naturally
- Close your right nostril with your right thumb
- Inhale deeply through your left nostril
- Close your left nostril with the ring finger of your right hand as you release the right nostril
- Exhale through your right nostril
- Keeping the left nostril closed, inhale deeply through your right nostril
- Seal your right nostril again with your thumb, then release your left nostril
- Exhale out of your left nostril. You should now be in the original position, with your thumb sealing your right nostril. This is one cycle
- Try to balance each inhalation and exhalation so they are the same length through each nostril

**Repeat up to 8-10 full cycles and gradually increase the number of repetitions as you get more practice.**

# A SIMPLE MEDITATION





## Counting Down Meditation Technique

- Imagine yourself somewhere calm and peaceful
- Take a deep breath in and allow your breath to calm and relax you
- Take another breath and feel even more calm
- Now gaze upwards from your bed or wherever you are and strain your eyes just a bit by focusing on something above your normal field of vision.
- Continue staring and straining your eyes
- Now count backwards from 20 to 1 until you cannot hold your eyes open any longer
- When you cannot hold them open any longer simply close them and enjoy the relaxing feeling
- You can also envisage yourself walking down a beautiful stairway, counting backwards from 10 to 1. When you reach 1 you will be in a nice relaxed state, breathe in and out for each step down the stairs that you walk.

# HERBAL REMEDIES





## HERBAL REMEDIES

The herbs listed below are the most common ones used to treat temporary insomnia. Please be aware that if you are taking prescription medication of any kind they can interact with these drugs so check with your Doctor before taking any kind of herbal remedy and if you develop any signs of an allergy stop immediately. Please note that none of these products are recommended for use by pregnant women or children. Please do your homework and don't take any risks.

### CHAMOMILE

Chamomile has been used in teas to aid sleep for thousands of years because it contains a substance called flavonoids that help to reduce anxiety and aid sleep.

It is most commonly taken as a tea or a tincture (a concentrated extract mixed with alcohol). You can also use chamomile as a bath soak.

### VALERIAN

The dried valerian root can be made into teas or tinctures and it can also be bought as a capsule or tablet.

### OATS

Oats contain melatonin, which is a natural hormone that helps regulate the sleep wake cycle. They also contain tryptophan - so try having porridge at bedtime, not just for breakfast!

### PASSIONFLOWER

This is another traditional remedy as the chemicals in the flowers are said to be calming, and a muscle relaxant.

It is recommended to take it as a tea about an hour before bedtime.

# AROMATHERAPY







## AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy has been around for centuries. The theory behind it is that it taps into the healing power of the scents of essential oils. They can be delivered using diffusion, inhaled directly or applied to the skin but never in their undiluted form. These substances can interact with prescription medication so please check with your Doctor before using any of them in any form, and if you develop any signs of an allergy stop immediately. Always perform a patch test with any new substance and be aware that these are not recommended for children or pregnant women. Do your homework before using anything new.

### **The scents you can try that are traditionally used to aid sleep include:**

- **Lavender** - Swirl a few drops of lavender oil into a soothing bath or add a few drops to your pillow.
- **Lemon** - Add 2-3 drops of lemon oil to a pre-bedtime drink for a longer sleep.
- **Ylang Ylang** - Add two drops to a warm bath and soak yourself for at least ten minutes, making sure to breathe slowly and inhale deeply.
- **Jasmine** - Place jasmine potpourri strategically around the house to promote restful sleep when it's time for bed.
- **Vanilla** - Inhale 3-5 drops of vanilla oil before bedtime or add 5-10 drops to a warm bath for sweet dreams that will last all night long.
- **Geranium** - Beat insomnia by massaging 2-3 drops of diluted geranium oil into your neck, shoulders and scalp.



## **YOUR OWN IDEAS**

**If you have any ideas more tips or strategies that you have found help you sleep better please share them with me so I can pass them on to others**

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**Thank you**