

Creating Better Sleep Patterns

Sleep difficulty is usually caused by stress or tension. But once started, the difficulty may continue for a long time after the stress has passed. Bad sleeping habits often prolong the problem.

This sheet outlines a simple but effective plan for insomnia which works by altering your sleeping habits. You may find some of the instructions uncomfortable or unpleasant, but the plan will only work if you carry them out. You may find that for the 1st night or 2 that you follow this plan you will sleep even less than before. But if you continue on, you should notice a clear improvement in your sleep within about a week.

Instructions

- 1) Go to your bedroom intending to sleep **only** when you feel sleepy. Stick to this even if it means that you stay up very late.
- 2) When you go to bed, relax. Do not try to fall asleep. **Do not** read, watch TV, listen to the radio, smoke, eat or drink in bed.
- 3) If you do not fall asleep after 20 mins, get up and go to another room. This is the most difficult part. You will be strongly tempted to stay lying in bed but it is very important that you do not lie there awake.
- 4) In the other room you should do something relaxing such as reading or listening to soft music. Do not do anything active or energetic. Go to the bedroom again only when you feel sleepy.
- 5) If you still do not fall asleep repeat step 3. You may have to get up 6 times or more in a single night.
- 6) Set your alarm and get up at the same time every morning regardless of how much sleep you've had during the night. This will help your body develop a consistent sleep rhythm.
- 7) **Do not** sleep during the day.

Below are some other simple tips that may help

- ◆ Make sure that your bed and bedroom are comfortable, warm and tidy.
- ◆ Take moderate amounts of exercise during the day as this helps to make the body more tired in the evening and therefore it's easier to get to sleep.
- ◆ Don't drink tea, coffee or coke after 7pm. Try a milky drink or herbal tea before going to bed.
- ◆ Don't drink alcohol to help you sleep. It may help you fall asleep, but doesn't promote restful sleep. It will almost certainly make you wake up through the night and makes you pass urine more frequently.
- ◆ Don't eat / drink a lot late at night. Try to have your evening meal early, at least 2 hrs before bedtime.
- ◆ If you've had a bad night, resist the temptation to sleep the next day - as it will make it harder to fall asleep the following night.
- ◆ Avoid watching disturbing or violent films before bedtime. Only read light-hearted books or magazines in bed. Visualise a relaxing scene or get lost in a pleasant memory.
- ◆ For at least an hour before going to bed, try to relax properly, eg you could use a relaxation tape. Avoid exercising 2 hour before bedtime
- ◆ If something is troubling you and there is nothing you can do about it there and then, try writing it down before going to bed and then tell yourself to deal with it tomorrow.
- ◆ If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something relaxing. Only go back to bed when you're feeling sleepy.
- ◆ If worried, at least 2 hrs before bedtime, write down your problems that keep you awake. Also write down the next step that you need to take to resolve them. If a new worry comes to the fore at night, write it down or commit it to memory so that you can deal with it the next day.
- ◆ If you awaken, do not lie in bed tossing and turning in bed. Do something like listening to relaxing music, having a bath, making a milky drink.
- ◆ Try to avoid medication to help you sleep (benzodiazepines eg temazepam, diazepam and others similar to benzodiazepines such as zolpidem and zopiclone) as your body gets used to them.