

Tips for Healthy Sleep

Only go to bed when you are tired.

Never eat later than 3 hours before going to sleep.

Finish exercise at least 3 hours before going to bed.

Don't consume caffeine after 2pm.

Whilst establishing a healthy pattern of sleep, switch off the TV at least 1 hour before going to bed. This gives your mind a chance to process and absorb all the adrenaline released in response to the exciting imagery and to slow down to a more gentle pace (this applies to stimulating books and music as well).

It is OK to listen to relaxing music in bed.

Turn your alarm clock away from you so you cannot see it.

If you have not been able to get to sleep in 20 mins, do one of the exercises below or get up and do something boring!

The noises that wake us at night are variable and intermittent or which catch our attention, such as TV or radio dialogue, get the volume turned down or wear ear plugs

Make sure the room is dark; have lined curtains or a dark blind

Make sure your bed is comfortable, change mattresses, pillows and duvets regularly (remember the old saying – 'never skimp on on your bed or shoes, because if you are not in one, you are in the other')

Make sure your room is not too hot, turn the heating down, but make sure your bedding is warm enough to keep you comfortable when your body temperature gradually drops and is at its lowest (around 3am)

Keep a pen and paper next to your bed to write down ideas or thoughts you need to remember, once written down, you can let them go.

Exercises for sleeping

Two boxes

At night when you settle down for sleep, imagine two boxes beside your bed. Collect up all the worries, tensions and anxieties from the day and imagine putting them into one of the boxes – the problem box – and close the lid, telling yourself this is now my time to allow myself to relax and enjoy the rest and comfort of healing sleep, there is nothing I can do about these problems for now so I am letting them go into the box. Then go to the other box, your dream box which is full of wonderful, interesting dreams. You can take out any dream you wish and see how it develops, and find yourself drifting into a deep, comfortable, restful sleep, awakening in the morning refreshed, re-energised and looking forward to the day.

Practice being drowsy (only do this when you are ready to go to sleep)

Remember a time when you felt very tired, remember how your body felt.

Now, keeping that feeling, imagine you are surrounded by family and friends who are all just as tired as you.

As you look around, notice that one of them yawns. Watch them yawn. Then another one yawns.

As more people begin to yawn, notice how you feel, and notice that some have difficulty keeping their eyes open.

Let yourself join in the yawning.

Notice whether your eyes want to close, and even if your eyes are already closed, imagine them closing again, imagine them flickering then closing again, over and over again.

Yawn again and notice where you feel the yawn – in your throat or jaw – and let your mind drift and every time you find yourself drifting back again, just look around again at the circle of tired, yawning people.

As you yawn more, notice a warm, comfortable feeling spreading around you and let yourself drift again.

Quiet inner voice (use when wanting to go off to sleep)

Close your eyes and use your internal voice to describe to yourself silently whatever you are aware of.

Give your voice a slow, relaxing monotone. E.g. 'Now I see the ocean. Now I hear the crashing of the waves on the beach below me. Now I see the setting sun glinting on the waves far out at sea.' and so on.

No matter how bizarre the things are that come into your mind, just carry on describing them in a continuous stream with a monotone voice.

Remember the tone of your voice has a powerful effect upon your feelings.

Allow your internal voice to gently murmur a description of almost anything that comes into your mind, just drone on and on and you will find your mind drifting and wanting to nod off.

If you are still awake a few minutes after starting the process, then you need to do two things. First, make your voice even more monotonous as you describe your process.

Secondly, keep doing it and doing it and doing it. If you do this properly it is absolutely impossible to stay awake.

Letting the feeling unfold

Let yourself feel the emotion. Don't react to it. Just let yourself experience it.

Notice if there is any tension in your body related to that feeling and try to examine it.

Whereabouts in your body do you feel it? What is it like?

Next, ask yourself: 'Why do I feel like this?'

Whatever the answer, next ask yourself: 'Why does this matter to me?'

Again, whatever the answer, ask again: 'Why does that answer matter to me?'

Keep asking this over and over again until the answer is something positive that you want or care about. This is the positive value which your emotions are telling you about.

You will know when you have arrived at the right place when:

It is a positive feeling – something you wish for, not something you reject.

It is personal – it is about your values, not about what anyone else thinks, does or feels.

The original feeling is noticeably reduced or changed.

Pay attention to this positive, personal feeling and you will notice that your original feeling has been transformed into something positive and motivating.

When you use this exercise, you will find that disturbing emotions are actually reminding you of what matters to you most. When you are clear about the positives in your life, it is easier to relax and you can drift easily and comfortably off to sleep.

Theatre of the mind (use when waking up during the night)

Imagine you are sitting in the middle of an auditorium. In front of you the theatre curtains are closed.

Invite your unconscious to use the stage to show you whatever it wants.

Watch the curtains draw back and see what appears. Sometimes an image or some action will appear straight away, sometimes the stage will be completely dark.

Keep looking at whatever you see. If it starts off completely dark, just keep watching and let the imagery develop slowly as it wishes. Let your unconscious mind release any tension by communicating with you by sending a symbol. It doesn't matter what it is, just acknowledge the symbol and let the lights fade.

Keep watching. Let another image arise. There is no need to understand what you see. Equally, if you do get some meaning from it, that's fine.

If you feel your mind is active, combine it with describing what you are seeing with your internal voice in a gentle monotone, or simply carry on watching as you drift off to sleep.

The positive advantage of this exercise is not what you see, but simply the process of it.