SLEEP TIPS

Sleep plays an essential role in optimising your health and wellbeing, it 'resets' the brain each night and helps prepare you for the next day. On the other hand, not getting enough sleep can cause a range of mental and physical side effects.

If you have trouble getting to sleep, try these tips and ideas to beat restlessness or insomnia!

Distract yourself with meaningless mental lists

The prerequisite for sleep is a quiet mind. Think of something else, rather than what's worrying you; something with a story to it.

It can be anything of interest, but of no importance, so you can devote some brain energy to it without clashing into the real world and going straight back to your worries.

I fly a lot, so I imagine I have my own private jet and how would I arrange the furniture on it.

If you're someone who likes going to music festivals, what would your lineup be?

– Neil Stanley, sleep expert

Try to stay awake instead

Thinking about sleep and wishing for it to happen is a recipe for staying awake.

This is where paradoxical thinking comes in.

If you give yourself the paradoxical instruction to stay awake instead, you'll be more likely to fall asleep.

If you can be comfortable with the idea of remaining awake, then the performance anxiety and frustration that are associated with trying to sleep have nowhere to go and your arousal level drops.

– Prof. Colin Espie, Professor of Sleep Medicine at the University of Oxford

Or just get out of bed

If 20 minutes has gone by as the mind races and is unable to relax back to sleep, it's best to get out of bed.

Without looking at your phone or any other screen devices, go to another dimly lit room where you keep a notebook.

Write down the thoughts that are keeping you awake.

Finish with the words, 'It can wait until tomorrow.'

Then, go back to bed, focus on the breath, and mindfully relax into those words, giving yourself permission to yield to sleep.

– Jenni June, sleep consultant

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Write down whatever's freaking you out

Spend a maximum of 20 minutes just getting everything out of your head and onto paper every day.

It's a therapeutic way to see that you probably don't have loads to worry about, rather just a few reoccurring things.

You can then see which worries are hypothetical (i.e.,what if I make a mistake at work and lose my job) or 'real' worries (e.g., I made a mistake and have lost my job).

For the real worries you can then make an action plan / problem solve and for the hypothetical ones, learn to let them go.

– Kathryn Pinkham, insomnia specialist

Get back in bed and do some deep breathing

Deep breathing acts as a powerful distraction technique, particularly if paired with counting.

You want to aim to breathe out for longer than you breathe in, and pause after breathing in and out; so you might choose to count for three when you breathe in, then pause and count to five when you breathe out, then pause.

Really focus on your breathing and counting, and if your mind wanders off, just take note of that and return your attention to the exercise.

You may need to do this for ten minutes or so.

– Christabel Majendie, sleep therapist

Try not to try so hard

Try not to struggle or 'try harder' to overcome your sleeplessness or get rid of unwanted thoughts, as this can worsen insomnia.

One successful approach to overcome this negative cycle is to instead learn to observe and accept these struggles, using mindfulness strategies to help.

– Jenny Stephenson, director of HappySleepers

Plan to get some sun in the morning

Getting more sun exposure in the midmorning can help readjust the brain's internal clock.

Having a balanced circardian rhythm and putting yourself in the best possible physical condition for sleep will go a long way to making it easier to fall asleep quickly. The sleep you have will be of a higher quality too.

Getting fresh air, sunlight and some light exercise during the day will make it easier to fall asleep come night time.