

THE PATH TO SLEEP HEALTH:
RELAXATION



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STRESS MANAGEMENT AND SLEEP HYGIENE

STRESS MANAGEMENT

If worry about current life events is inhibiting your sleep, the best remedy is to resolve the problem creating the worry. Though if resolution isn't possible, there are other constructive ways to reduce worry.

- Talk to someone during the day.
Seek a friend or mental health professional for support.
- Break the cycle.
Worrying about your stressors when it's time to sleep is an unhealthy habit. You should work to retrain your mind not to engage in this behavior. Redirect your attention to your breathing or guided imagery.
- Keep a journal.
Write down what's worrying you when it keeps you from sleeping.
- Devote time during the day for worrying.
Allot 5-60 minutes specifically to thinking and worrying, ending at least two hours before bed.

SLEEP HYGIENE

The most common cause of insomnia is a change in your daily routine. For example, traveling, change in work hours, disruption of other behaviors (eating, exercise, leisure, etc.), and relationship conflicts can all cause sleep problems. Paying attention to good sleep hygiene is the most important thing you can do to maintain good sleep.

DO:	DON'T:
Go to bed at the same time each day.	Exercise just before going to bed.
Get up from bed at the same time each day.	Engage in stimulating activity just before bed, such as playing a competitive game, watching an exciting program on television or movie, or having an important discussion with a loved one.
Get regular exercise each day, preferably in the morning. There is good evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. This includes stretching and aerobic exercise.	Have caffeine in the evening (coffee, many teas, chocolate, sodas, etc.)
Get regular exposure to outdoor or bright lights, especially in the late afternoon.	Read or watch television in bed.
Keep the temperature in your bedroom comfortable.	Use alcohol to help you sleep.
Keep the bedroom quiet when sleeping.	Go to bed too hungry or too full.
Keep the bedroom dark enough to facilitate sleep.	Take another person's sleeping pills.
Use your bed only for sleep and sex.	Take over-the-counter sleeping pills, without your doctor's knowledge. Tolerance can develop rapidly with these medications. Diphenhydramine (an ingredient commonly found in over-the-counter sleep meds) can have serious side effects for elderly patients.
Take medications as directed. It is helpful to take prescribed sleeping pills 1 hour before bedtime, so they are causing drowsiness when you lie down, or 10 hours before getting up, to avoid daytime drowsiness.	Take daytime naps.
Use a relaxation exercise just before going to sleep. o	Command yourself to go to sleep. This only makes your Mind and body More alert. If you lie in bed awake for more than 20-30 minutes, get up, go to a different room (or different part of the bedroom), ilarticipate in a quiet activity (e.g-non-excitabile reading of -television), and then return to bed when you feel sleepy. Do this as many times during the night as needed.
Muscle relaxation, imagery, massage, warm bath, etc.	
Keep your feet and hands warm. Wear warm socks and/or mittens or gloves to bed.	



RELAXATION: A GUIDE

There are many approaches to training your mind and body to relax. None is "right" for everyone - so find an approach that makes sense and works for you. Learning to relax muscle groups physically, mental relaxation, meditation, yoga, prayer, biofeedback - all are possible approaches. And, as the body is connected to the mind and emotions, relaxation can be a starting point for improving overall wellness.

Learning to relax takes time and practice in order for you to become proficient.

LEARNING TO BREATHE

When we become stressed, our bodies activate the instinctive "fight-or-flight" response, leading to a shallow and quick breathing pattern. Most often we simply feel this breathing pattern as anxiety. When we recognize our anxiety, we often become more anxious about how its making us feel. Deep breathing breaks this cycle by intentionally slowing our breaths.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Try the following relaxation exercise before you get into bed:

- Lie on your back on the bed/floor with your feet slightly apart, your hands by your sides, and your palms turned upward.
- Close your eyes and concentrate on every part of your body. Remember to breathe! (See Deep Breathing steps)
- Begin at the top of your head and work your way down to your toes. Start by feeling your forehead tense, then your eyes, then your jaw, finally your entire face — almost like your 'scrunching your face' from sour lemons.
- Squeeze and tense each individual muscle group, hold for 5 seconds, and then release. Try to tense ONLY one select muscle group at a time — this ability improves with practice.
- Move down from your head, to your neck, through your shoulders and arms. Continue down through the trunk of your body, down through your thighs, into your calves, through the arch of your feet, and ending at the tip of your toes. Wiggle ONLY your toes for 10 seconds as the final step.
- As you become more aware of your body parts, concentrate on your breathing and let all your worry and stress dissipate from your mind and body as you tense and release.

Through practice, this exercise will tell your body and mind that it is okay to settle down, leaving behind thoughts of worry, fear, and stress. Performing this exercise regularly, you will notice that it becomes much easier to reach a state of relaxation.

DEEP BREATHING

- PRIMING:** Slowly relax your body, starting with your feet. Wiggling ONLY your toes for 10 seconds is a great first step. Continue moving through every part of your body, one segment at a time, until you've reached—and relaxed—your face and scalp.
- NOTICING:** Slowly begin to inhale through your nose—first filling your lower belly, then your stomach, and then your chest and the top of your lungs almost up to your shoulders. Hold for a second or two, and then begin to exhale through your mouth until your lungs are completely empty. Continue this breathing for a few minutes—paying close attention to how the breath fills your lungs and how tense spots in your body begin to decompress.
- INTENTION:** After a few minutes, begin to inhale through your nose counting from 0 to 5. Once you reach 5, hold your breath and count backwards slowly from 5 to 0. Once you reach 0, exhale through your mouth while counting slowly from 0 to 5.
- LETTING GO:** You'll notice that your breathing naturally slows and becomes more regular. Remember, don't force your breathing—it's not a contest!
- ACCEPTING:** After a while, imagine that you're resting on a warm, gentle ocean. The sun is shining peacefully on your body. Imagine that you rise on the gentle swells of the water when you inhale, and that you slowly descend as you exhale.

Continue this deep breathing process as long as you wish (hopefully until you fall asleep).

Practice this breathing technique on a daily basis so that it becomes a natural routine for you and helps to induce natural sleep.

The results of this breathing technique are immediate. You will feel your shoulders and arms relaxing. Your chest will feel less constricted and you will feel less stress and tension.

DRINK HERBAL TEAS

Try a cup of hot chamomile tea. This contains natural ingredients which may help you sleep.

Lie down with your eyes closed and imagine you're in your very favorite, most peaceful place. It may be on a sunny beach, swinging in a hammock in the mountains or your backyard. Wherever it is, imagine you're there.

You can see your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the fragrance of the flowers, and feel the warmth of the sun or whatever sensations are there. Just relax and enjoy it—and drift off to sleep.

Once you've found a place that's especially peaceful and effective, you'll find that the more you use it, the more you can count on it to help you relax and get to sleep. Its comfort and familiarity will make it increasingly more effective.

