

Sleep Hygiene

What follows are some basic elements for healthy sleep hygiene in order to get a good night's sleep. After all, why not put all the odds on your side of the bed!?

1. Eliminate all light sources in the bedroom: alarm clock, bare window, lamp, nightlight, wireless phone, etc.;
2. Eliminate all sources of noise (e.g. by turning off household appliances including cell phones) when possible. Otherwise you might want to get a good pair of earplugs;
3. Avoid drinking caffeine late in the afternoon or in the evening, or any sweet drinks, for example, soft drinks;
4. Getting a comfortable mattress and pillow is an asset... as is clean bedding. You may also want to get a body pillow or knee pillow for added comfort and quality of sleep;
5. In more serious cases, remove TV, tablet, cell phone, video game console from the bedroom: sleep (and sexual exchanges) must become the main activity of the bedroom;
6. Avoid any "significant" brain activity (e.g. studies, important reading, preparation for work...) at least two to three hours before bedtime;
7. Avoid vigorous physical activities such as active/vigorous sports, weight lifting, etc.;
8. Put on relaxing or meditation music to create a sleep-inducive ambiance. You may also prepare a caffeine-free herbal tea such as chamomile;
9. Set the temperature of the bedroom to an adequate temperature conducive to a good night sleep (ideally on the cool side);
10. If after 20 minutes you don't fall asleep, get out of bed and work on a boring task, for example, watch a black-and-white TV show or a boring movie (outside the bedroom of course) or wash the dishes, wash the bath tub (but not the whole bathroom!), etc. Hopefully you'll get a little tired and synchronize your overactivated mind to your tired body. Then go back to bed using one of the following methods.

Sleep Method 1: Breathing I

- a) Tuck yourself into bed and adopt a comfortable position, ideally on your (left) side otherwise on your back (avoid on your belly due to neck, back pain and feeling tired!);
- b) Relax your body by starting with a deep exhalation;
- c) With your eyes closed, focus your visual attention to the tip of your nose;
- d) Start with a deep exhalation followed by normal/average breaths and exhalations;

- e) Focus your attention on the sound of your breathing, take the time to listen to the sound of the air coming in through your nostrils, and coming out of them (note: if you are visual, imagine a mist of your favorite colour entering your nostrils and coming out of them every time you inhale and exhale;
- f) You may also repeat a mantra at the rhythm of your breathing, for example: "I'm sleepy – I fall asleep... I'm sleepy – I fall asleep... I'm sleepy – I fall asleep...";
- g) If needed, flush out any thoughts obstructing the relaxation process. For example, you may tell yourself: "I'm in bed at the moment: I'm here to sleep, I want to sleep and I'm going to sleep. I don't have to think about anything but sleep". Then relax and breathe: exhale... inhale... And apply the sleep method. You can also imagine the intrusive thought as a train that goes along the horizon, from right to left (or vice versa) into oblivion, and bring all your attention back to the rhythm and sound of your breathing. You may have to chase away your intrusive thoughts several times. Don't worry about this: it's totally normal at this point. Be patient with yourself... and chase away those disturbing thoughts one after the other while focusing on your breathing. After all, you're retraining your brain, replacing old neurological pathways that have been around for months –even years– with new ones. It's neuroplasticity in action!

These methods serve to immerse yourself in the here-and-now, with all your attention focused in the present moment, which will offer your overactive mind the opportunity to synchronize with your tired body... and ultimately fall asleep. 😊

Give yourself and these methods a chance to work. Don't give up after one or two nights: there's nothing like practice! After all, you've had difficulty sleeping for quite some time already. Discipline is a must: give yourself at least three to four weeks for your rhythm of sleep to adjust to this new way. You should start to see encouraging changes soon!



Sleep Checklist

- 1) Lie down on your (left) side;
- 2) Exhale deeply and relax your body and mind;
- 3) Focus your visual attention to the tip of your nose while exhaling and inhaling, and focus on the sound of your breathing (and visualize the passage of the air coming in and out);
- 4) Repeat the mantra "I'm sleepy – I fall asleep" with each inhalation – exhalation;
- 5) Chase away any intrusive thought and go back to item # 2.



Sleep Method 2: Breathing II

Tuck yourself into bed, adopt a relaxing position and perform 60 slow and deep exhalations/ inhalations. Pay your full attention to the rhythm of your breaths: sounds, chest movements, physical sensations... If needed, drive away any disturbing thought (i.e. imagine the train with your thought disappear into the horizon) and bring all your attention back to the rhythm of your breathing.

Sleep Method 3: Muscle contractions

Start by contracting your toes by doing two slow contractions and release the tension. Then move on to your feet, always doing a slow double-contraction and releasing gently. Then to your ankles, calves, knees, thighs, pelvic area, hips, lower abdomen (abdominals), upper chest (pectorals), shoulders, upper arms (biceps and triceps), elbows, forearms, wrists, hands, fingers, thumbs, then back to your shoulders, neck, jaw, ears, face, lips, nose, cheeks, eyes and eyebrows always making two smooth contractions and then releasing gently. Hopefully you will become sleepy before the end of the exercise otherwise simply start the experience over.

Sleep Method 4: Guided imagery

Go on an adventure!

Another approach is to do mental imaging or guided meditation. Here are some ideas:

- a) Imagine being in the quiet or safe place of your choice (i.e. a place where you feel safe and at peace) where you exercise the breathing mode of your choice;
- b) Imagine diving near a Caribbean coral reef. Follow (pursue?) the fish, explore the seabed, be curious and let your imagination guide you;
- c) Imagine canoeing on a calm shallow lake or on a river that flows gently. Pay attention to the environment, to nature, to your senses;
- d) Imagine hiking in a new forest or new trail. Look around you, pay attention to the trees, to nature, to the sensations you feel as you immerse yourself in this peaceful setting;
- e) Imagine camping near a lake or a stream, in the countryside, in the middle of nature, with great weather, where a light breeze caresses your face and body;
- f) Imagine walking along a beach where the sun shines, where a warm and soft breeze blows, and where the birds hover in the blue summer sky;
- g) Imagine visiting a favorite uncle, aunt, cousin, grandparent, old friend...;
- h) Project yourself into the African savannah, or into the jungle of Brazil. Go on an adventure! It's free... plus it's eco-friendly!
- i) Imagine that you are in nature and must pick mushrooms of 30 different varieties and colors; place them in a basket. Go on and explore!

- j) Imagine that you're at the beach... or in the ocean or lake where you have to find 30 different species of conchs and shells, and put them in a container. Enjoy going on this sea quest! Feel free to stage everything! No worries: your unconscious will guide you.
- k) Imagine yourself preparing for a flight to the moon –or even Mars or any other planet for that matter– embarking in the space shuttle of your choice, putting in the harness, starting the engines, etc. It's a very eco friendly, safe and fun way to start the journey for your dream travels;
- l) See yourself in the middle of a field, where you see a tree in the far horizon. Now walk slowly toward that tree... focus on each step you take... getting closer and closer to the tree... Who knows what you'll discover when you finally get to the tree!?;
- m) Imagine yourself making a piece of furniture, working in your garden, doing a puzzle, knitting a scarf, or doing any relaxing activity. Do avoid work projects or household chores or renovations, etc.;
- n) Imagine being a bee –a frog, a fish, a raccoon... and why not a mouse?! And go foraging in the meadows.

Now that you get the drift, let your imagination guide you into new places, new landscapes, new environments...

Use your imagination and multiply the different scenarios where you occupy your mind in the here-and-now as this is the key. And let your imagination be free!

Have you always dreamt of climbing Mount Everest?! So why not do it while you sleep: it's much (much!) safer, warmer... and cheaper too! 😊

Sleep Method 5: Song

Choose a song of your choice and try to recite it or sing it inside your head, note for note. Here are three examples: 1) *Oh My My* (first minute) by Jane Siberry; 2) *Rachel's Song* by Vangelis; 3) *The Host of Seraphim* by Dead Can Dance. Simply let yourself be guided and waltzed by the melody.

Sleep Method 6: Prayer

If you are a person of faith, why not ask God to help you sleep by bringing you peace, serenity, unconditional love and care in order to obtain the grace of sleep? You may want to add to it a prayer of gratitude or some other form of prayer. *Namaste*.

Sleep Method 6: Sleep with relaxation or meditation app

You may also use a relaxation or meditation app such as *Calm*, *Headspace*, *Relax Yoga Meditation*, *Insight Timer*, *Placidity*, *White Noise*, *Waking up*, and, ideally with the help of wireless ear buds, turn on one of these apps in order to help you fall quietly and peacefully asleep.

