

A How-To for Sweet Sleep

Written by Grace

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Do you ever find that sleep eludes you?

For something so vital, so many of us do not get nearly enough.

So often sleep can seem like time wasted, when the to-do list is running on and the world is moving onwards, who has time for snoozing in bed?

Have you ever stayed up an hour later - just to get that task finished off?

Did you know that when you lose an hour of sleep, you don't gain an hour of productive time? Not at all, in fact you reduce your productivity greatly with each hour you give up.

I learned this doing the research for my Successful Sleeping Workshop. It shocked me, and it made me go to bed earlier!

(We teach what we need to learn).

The problem is, when we are in bed, how can we actually get to sleep? With whirring minds and spinning thoughts, how on earth does sleep come?

Well, I have some suggestions...

Mindfulness:

We can stop and take time to appreciate our surroundings and be here now. The sound which



could be

irritating can become an exercise in letting go or can become a sound-scape: a landscape of sound. Do the sounds, smells, textures or sights around you bring up any images or feelings for you? We are just expanding our awareness, not cataloguing or engaging just bringing closer awareness to this moment.

Many people say they do not have time for meditation or mindfulness practice, but it is not something that has to take hours. Several of my teachers recommend a "3 minute" breathing space, and [Sue Weston, my Tai Chi Qui Gong](#) teacher actually talks about a "3 second" exercise. As she says no-one is too busy for 3 seconds! Whatever you do, just do it, stop, breathe, be.

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An exercise for 3 seconds is still powerful, no-one is saying it will solve everything and you may still be agitated but it is a practice, your body practices stopping and resting, the more you get into it the body remembers and the practice deepens. If it takes the edge off your tension the tiniest bit it is still worth it. No magic pill but practice, experience and kindness of living in our bodies and hearts.

If we do this, if we syphon off some of the roaring thoughts that live in all of our monkey minds, then they won't ambush us the moment our head hits the pillow.

If you have worries waking you up at 3 am, maybe they need somewhere to be released in the day. Mindful moments give you that.

Treasure Chests:

We all need to work with our treasure chests. Create a treasure chest of joys, of happy activities, pleasant memories, blessings, gratitudes, favourite things. Put it together physically and use it when you can't sleep. Put in things to help you cope, a relaxation c.d, a journal, whatever is right for you.

Then you can have a strong-chest. This can be a box or chest that you keep somewhere, either physically or mentally. You put all your problems, sorrows and worries into it. You can do it before you enter your home in a chest by the door or before you sleep or sit down to a meal with your family. A chest is safe, it is designed to hold things. If you really need to you can put your worries there for a while, take a break and if you need to you can pick them back up afterwards. This is somewhere that can store all your "baggage and burdens". You may want it to become a God Box. Where you put your problems and then they are in the hands of the Divine and all you need to do is trust and follow the guidance you receive. Again this can be physical or imaginary, but if you like the idea, use it and lay your burdens down, rest and enjoy some time with your treasure chests.

Sleep Care:

We have had a lot of success with sleep care. It is very simple but remarkably powerful. Basically you make the room where you sleep a place which is conducive to rest and then you reserve it for rest only. Therefore the room should be decorated in a way that calms you. I'm not suggesting redecoration but there are easy things we can do. If the walls are not a rest-ful colour, (and it doesn't matter what colour as long as you consider it restful) then you can cover them with perhaps pictures or wall hangings. Create your own home "Bedscape". You can put covers or sheets over any open bookcases or shelving units so that you are not looking at stimulating or work related things at night. If you can't devote a room entirely to sleeping and many of us can't then try and have the desk or television facing away from the bed.

Then make sure you only sleep in bed. You don't eat in bed, or watch television or read, you just sleep there. This means that you begin to associate your bed and the room with sleep and rest and so sleep and rest come more easily to you there.

Another important part of sleep hygiene is the routine. You have a regular bedtime and rising

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time and a bedtime routine. You turn getting into night clothes, brushing teeth, bedtime prayers, whatever you do in the evening into a calming, relaxing routine.

Helping Your Body Rest:

It seems obvious, but needs mentioning, especially as one client was struggling with insomnia and it turned out she was having so much coffee daily that she was twitching with the caffeine and that was why she couldn't sleep until three am every night! Cut out or at least cut down the coffee. No coffee after midday. No television for at least an hour before bed and try to eat before seven pm.

Wind down with a calming herbal tea or whatever is suitable for you.

Make sure your room is dark. If you need to put up blackout curtains so be it. When we first did this we couldn't prioritise blackout curtains in our budget so we bought blackout material and tacked it to the inside of our normal curtains and it worked wonderfully. Put opaque tape over any glowing lights from c.d players or digital clocks if you can manage without them at night. If you may need the clock then try and put something in front of it that you can move if you need to see the time. Also it can be useful to try and make sure that all electronic devices (especially mobile phones) are at least an arms length away from the bed as we don't want to sleep bathed in EMFs (electro-magnetic frequencies).

Pile of Clouds:

Is your bed comfortable? Lets make it so! If your back hurts every morning then your mattress could be too old, and it could be time to get a new one. If you don't have the money right now then perhaps you could get a mattress topper for now and then saw up. Disclaimer: If your back hurts every morning you also need to get your doctor to check that out. Most pillows need changing every three months, because they lose their support and because of dust mites. Go for dust mite free bedding if you can and use as many pillows as you need. We have so many pillows for all my aches and pains and to go under my legs at night. This helps us, experiment with what helps you. A good way to make your bed into a delicious pile of clouds is each time you need to replace something replace it with what you really want, so when you need a new mattress get a good supportive one and then cover it with an anti-dustmite protection cover so it says good.

Relax:

Worrying about sleep, doesn't help us sleep. I know it is almost impossible not to worry but meditation, audio books, relaxation exercises and so forth can all be used to help you rest in bed if you cannot sleep.

Sanctuary. Imagine an inner safe place where you can go and feel calm, go there now.

Senses.

Use relaxing sensory experiences. What is relaxation to you? What invokes relaxation and the sensation of ease? It could be falling asleep, a massage, the knowledge of nothing to do, a massage, a hug, a warm bath, the smell of clean linen, candle light, the sea and the beach.

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whatever it is for you, create or invoke it to relax today. Use smell, taste, colour and imagery. Is there something that you like to look at that makes you feel relaxed? A place, or view, or a picture or object. Gather these and use them.

Space.

Give yourself some space. Plan some space into the day and then in it ask yourself what you want to do? Rather than thinking "I need to rest I will plan an activity and Get It Done." Just plan some space, plan it into your schedule like an appointment, it is an important appointment with You. This appointment is you, its your life. Then when you get to it ask yourself what you feel like doing? Give yourself time to answer and listen to the little voice. Don't dismiss it if you think it is a strange idea or not what you imagined as 'rest'. If you have not listened to yourself for a while it might be a very little voice, a fleeting thought or sensation but the more you listen the stronger it will get, the more in touch you will be with your intuition, your self, inimitably You. Listen, you may want to walk down the road, eat some cherries, read a childhood book, go to bed for 20 minutes, rub your feet, pick something off this list. Do it and release the guilt and enjoy. This is important. We all desire happiness and joy, so have some now. You can't help others without taking care of you so we can release that worry and expand into our present space.

(Ad)Venture Outside.

Try getting outside, and get some fresh air, and hopefully some sunlight, for a break. You could take your tea, or meditation practice out there too. Enjoy the increase in oxygen. Often we spend too much time in air conditioned or closed window places and do not have enough oxygen and this makes us sleepy and also grumpy. Inside open some windows if that is possible and include some nice air cleaning plants – we choose round leafed ones as much as possible as we have found that spiky leafed plants can make a spiky atmosphere. I like rubber plants, spider plants, boston ferns, ivy, aloe vera, orchids and lovely peace lilies. Go outside and breathe deeply. Pull up your sleeves and enjoy some vitamin D – for 15 minutes if you can on as much skin as possible bearing in mind sun safety. Even on a grey day things are often nicer outside than you think, wrap up and enjoy the – we are going to call it fresh and bracing rather than cold – weather!

Breathe.

There are so many variations on this and it is worth exploring and finding ones you resonate with and new ones to try to keep your practice fresh. You can look into mindfulness, pranayama, different forms of meditation, biofeedback, visualisation, guided meditation, buddhist meditation and many others.

For now try breathing in a light the colour of your choice, whatever you need right now will come to you (but gold is always a good general life force/ healing/ love/ God light colour) and see yourself breathing out negativity – smoke, dark colours, pain etc. See the gold fill you up and the darkness become less and less and feel this is so.

Create a hammock.

If you do not have a hammock to enjoy then you can create one. Hammocks are places just for

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relaxation, they are not for anything else. We can create a space which is just for relaxation, which is what hammocks are and why they are relaxing. Lie outside on a blanket or inside have a special blanket to lie on or under that is just for your relaxation periods. Gradually you will associate the blanket or space with relaxation and it will be relaxing just to be near it.

What are your favourite tips to sleep well? Share in the comments or join the chat on our [Facebook page](#).