

# How to Get a Good Night's sleep

And then we can talk about Happiness!

My mother used to say that you can deal with anything once you have had a good night's sleep. I think she was right. The other side of that coin, however, is that it is difficult to deal with anything if you have a bad night's sleep. It is impossible to



even consider your happiness levels if you are permanently exhausted. Let's do something about that first and then we can work on increasing your wellbeing even further.

Missing a few hours of sleep for just a few nights can start to affect your mood, your decision making and your whole approach to life. Sleep is a physiological necessity, critical for all of our bodily functions. If you are sleeping badly you hardly need me to tell you that.

Sleeplessness can be the result a medical condition of some sort – depression or perhaps an anxiety disorder of some kind. If you think this applies to you, you

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need to speak with your primary caregiver in addition to trying some of the things below. Actually, doctors report sleeplessness as being one of the most common complaints they hear.

In the book *Stitch Your own Silver Linings*, and also in the *Help Yourself to Happiness* workbook, I mention the fact that I have always struggled to achieve eight hours of sleep each night. It turns out that I may not need so much sleep after all. The figure of eight hours is an *average* figure. There is no perfect amount of sleep for everyone. In fact, the quality and amount of sleep people need varies enormously.

A number of factors need to be considered. Your age is the first. Babies can sleep for over 15 hours. Young people need a lots of sleep too; so don't be too hard on your teenagers if they insist on sleeping over 11 hours a night, they probably need it. Most adults need between seven and eight and a half hours, and as we get older that drops down to around six hours. However, some people can happily survive on four hours of sleep, although it is unusual.



How much you sleep is also 'in the family'. Check with your folks or your brothers or sisters to see how much they sleep. These factors are important to consider.

I *struggled* to achieve eight hours sleep because perceived wisdom, at that time, told me I needed that amount in order to perform at my optimum.

I now know I only need between six and seven hours. I go to bed half an hour later and get up a half hour earlier. Most of the time I sleep very well.

Okay, so what about you? Try the following:

Check your environment.

- ✓ Remove computers and other electronic gizmos, including your phone charger out of your bedroom. Your sleeping area needs to be peaceful and designed to promote rest.
- ✓ Keep your bedroom temperature cool 17-19 degrees Celsius is thought to be best to aid restful sleep
- ✓ Wear an eye mask to block out all the light.
- ✓ Close your bedroom door to keep out noise.
- ✓ Check that your mattress is comfortable and the right type for your needs.

## Check your lifestyle

- ✓ As far as possible try to prevent anything waking you once you have fallen asleep. So, if you tend to use the bathroom in the middle of the night, don't drink after a certain time during the evening.
- ✓ Don't eat anything that is likely to cause indigestion and don't eat too late in the evening.
- ✓ Limit alcohol and caffeine in general but especially before bed. You may find that alcohol helps you to 'drop off' but you pop awake as bright as a button in the early hours. And, obviously, in terms of your general health it is not advisable to use alcohol as a sleeping aid.
- ✓ If the bathroom in the middle of the night is not a problem, try drinking some warm milk. Milk contains tryptophan, an amino acid, which helps to encourage sleepiness.

if you have a tendency for night time **thinging** (See Stitch Your own Silver Linings) That is,

Ruminating – churning the same negative thoughts over and over.

Imagining – what if?

Exaggerating – making something worse than it is.

Try this exercise:

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**Banish night time thinging.**

Have pen and paper by your bed in readiness. Accept the negative thoughts, don't fight them. Sit up, take your pen and paper and start writing. This should be automatic free-flowing writing – literally empty your thoughts from your head on to the paper. Only you will see what you write so there is no need to censor yourself. Keep writing and if the same thoughts repeat themselves, keep writing them down. Carry on with this until there is nothing left to say. Eventually, you will stop writing. Put the paper by your bed and tell yourself you will deal with the thoughts in the morning. Mentally repeat the gratitude exercise until you go to sleep.

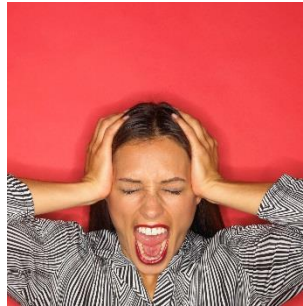
The Gratitude exercise is a simple but very effective exercise to do that helps to increase happiness levels. For our purposes here, it replaces negative thoughts with positive thoughts to help with sleeping.

Just think of three things you are grateful for – it could be your children or grandchildren or an event that happened to you – and focus only on that. When the people who carry out the *Banish night time thinging* exercise read in the morning what they thought about during the night, they are often shocked, but mostly embarrassed. Embarrassed because of the high level of *'thinging'* in their thoughts, especially imagining and exaggerating.

If you have tried all of those things and are still battling to get to sleep, read on.

# What we resist, persists.

Have you ever been so  
get to sleep, that you have  
frustration? Perhaps,  
big day the following day



annoyed, because you couldn't  
punched your pillow in  
concerned because you had a  
and felt that lack of sleep

would impair your performance? Have you been mad at your partner because they  
sleep like a baby whilst you are wide awake and struggling?

What starts to happen then is you dread going to bed at all because you 'just know' you are going to have a bad night. You associate your bedroom/bed with a lack of sleep; you are immediately anxious about not sleeping and so you don't sleep. It becomes a self- fulfilling prophecy.

Well, I am happy to tell you that there is a new approach.

Acceptance.

In the *thinging* exercise above, I ask you to accept your negative thoughts and that is precisely because of the notion that what we resists, persists. I have used that term so often but have never considered it with reference to sleep.

When your body senses threat of any kind it goes into what we call 'fight or flight' mode. It is an evolutionary instinct designed to protect you from danger. Your senses become alert. Your body tenses, you heart beats faster, your breath quickens and you are ready to run away, or stand your ground and fight that *tiger*. Of course,

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nowadays we don't usually have to fight the tiger, **but** if, your brain receives a message of potential harm or threat, boom! Adrenalin and cortisol flow and your body is on full alert. These days that perceived threat probably comes from your boss, your family, your problems, or your, often faulty negative thinking. In this case, your thoughts around sleep. Your brain cannot tell if you are fighting the fear of the tiger or the fear of not sleeping. **All systems alert** just when you want to sleep is not good.

## ACT ON YOUR SLEEPLESSNESS

Negative thoughts persist because we focus on them giving them energy and importance. They fade away if we offer no resistance.

ACT is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy which is about accepting what is out of your control whilst committing to action to improve your quality of life. It is a blend of behavioural therapy and mindfulness. I suggest you have a look at it. It could help with sleeping but the benefits will also bleed through into other areas of your life. A part of meditation is training the mind to acknowledge thoughts that come up during practices but then let them go. Distancing yourself from the thought.

There are lots of reasons for losing sleep, some, I have mentioned, and most of the time we can deal with losing a few night's sleep. I hope some of the things discussed here have helped you. I have included a Bibliography/ further resources below.

**Put your battle with sleep to bed**

If your sleep issues are more difficult for you, seek out expert help. There is help out there, you just need to find what is right for you.

**Now we can start to raise your happiness levels!**

*With sincere best wishes for your happiness and health*

*Christine*

[www.ChristineLConroy.com](http://www.ChristineLConroy.com)



## References/further resources

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