

**David Holmes**  
Hypnotherapy

**Overcome problems  
Feel great  
Achieve your goals**

**7 SIMPLE STEPS  
FOR A  
BETTER NIGHTS SLEEP**

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## 7 simple steps for a better nights sleep.

Just getting a good nights sleep, is for many people a very tiring business. Over the years I've discovered that the *habit* of sleeping well falls into two separate areas. Practical, physical steps you can take to help you achieve a long lasting, deeper sleep and psychological techniques to help you overcome anxious, worrying or high speed 'thought loops' that keep you awake.

### Practical steps.

- Create a room used solely for sleeping in, so don't watch television or use a lap top etc. in your sleeping room.
- Have a relaxing bath or read a book before going to bed.... it really does work
- Exercise during the day. Light exercise, studies have shown, helps to reduce anxiety, stress and depression. Taking exercise works on two levels. It obviously makes us tired, as well as causing the release of happy chemicals in our brain. You don't need to go a to gym. A walk, swim, or a bike ride are all beneficial, or even light stretching if your less active at the moment.
- Get up half an hour earlier. Recent research suggests that regularly getting up half an hour earlier helps to reset your sleep clock
- Avoid cat-napping during the day.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol or nicotine at least three hours before going to bed.
- Don't talk about or discuss anxiety provoking thoughts for at least three hours before going to bed.

### Techniques for coping with anxious thoughts.

Usually, the first part of our sleep cycle is devoted to slow wave, deep sleep that physically restores us.

During the latter part of the cycle R.E.M (rapid eye movement) occurs. This is the part of our sleep pattern when we dream. Unsurprisingly, it's known as 'dream sleep'.

The ratio is usually 2 hours dreaming for 6 hours sleep.

This dream sleep reduces stress levels by acting out, rehearsing possible events and re-ordering our memories.

In a way, dreaming helps to de-activate unfulfilled expectations by acting as an emotional discharge mechanism.

So dreaming is a safety valve that helps us process information and emotions while we are asleep.

Too much worrying can put a strain on this mechanism. Feeling anxious or depressed increases the sheer volume of material your brain needs to process, meaning you get less deep sleep and wake up feeling exhausted no matter how long you have slept.

Take your mind away from anxious, uneasy thoughts with these simple and pleasant distraction techniques.

## Guided imagery.

You might want to practice this technique a few times during the day before using it.

Close your eyes and begin to breathe very slowly and deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth. At the top of your breath, hold for three seconds and then count to five on every out-breath. As you breathe out, imagine you are breathing away any nervous tension left in your body.

Make sure you breathe from your diaphragm (lower chest area) and not from the upper chest. Feel what happens to your body as you breathe. If you are breathing properly, your stomach will go out as you breathe in and go in as you breathe out. This can take a little practice if you are unused to diaphragmatic breathing.

You can also say the word *relax* on every out-breath, if you wish. Continue this breathing pattern ten or more times, or as long as it takes for you to feel completely relaxed.

Notice the tension in your body. Beginning with your toes, imagine the tension slowly falling away from your body and vanishing. Imagine it freeing each body part one at a time starting with your toes and working its way up your body.

Visualise each part of your body becoming lighter and lighter as the tension is removed. Relax your toes, then your feet. Continue with your calves, thighs, hips, stomach and so on, until you've relaxed each portion, including your face and head.

Next, think of a relaxing scene. It can be somewhere you've already been or an imagined scene. A holiday or a favourite room, or a walk down a wooded path towards a golden beach.

You're lying down, comfortable, wonderfully relaxed and safe. And with every breath it becomes easier to drift off and let go. Say to yourself, "the calmer my breathing becomes, the more I relax." Just drift off when you want to.

## Dispelling anxious thoughts.

Think of something pleasant, something that makes you feel good, like:

- Someone you love
- A pile of cash
- A magic moment from a relationship or holiday
- Owning a fantastic house or car

Take a few moments to generate a warm feeling about it.

## Next

Think of a red traffic light, a stop sign or a traffic policeman holding up one hand.

## Now

Whenever your anxious thoughts occur go straight to the image (or sense/feeling) of a stop sign or red traffic light. Then move directly to your pleasant happy thought.

It's just like playing a mental card game of snap. As soon as you have an uncomfortable thought, you immediately slap a happy thought on top. Try it!

## Sending anxious thoughts away.

### Mindfulness Techniques: Sending thoughts away on clouds.

Distressing emotions are much easier to bear if you only focus on the present - on each moment one at a time. This is an exercise to increase your mindfulness of the present moment so that you can clear away thoughts about past and future events.

Start by observing your breathing.

Don't try to change anything about your breathing, just notice the sensations of breathing air into and out of your body.

Try to focus all of your attention on your breathing.

As you breathe, close your eyes and imagine that you are laying on a lawn of soft grass, looking up at a blue sky.

Let your mind become as clear and empty as a perfect blue sky.

If any thoughts drift into your mind, imagine yourself breathing them out so that each thought forms a cloud that you send blowing across the clear, blue sky.

Allow your thoughts to drift away from you, like clouds across the sky, until your mind becomes empty again - only filled by the image of a clear, blue sky.

### Sending Thoughts Away on Leaves.

Start by observing your breathing.

Don't try to change anything about your breathing, just notice the sensations of breathing air into and out of your body.

Try to focus all of your attention on your breathing.

As you breathe, close your eyes and imagine that you are sitting beside a stream, with water gently flowing over rocks and rippling past you.

Let your mind become as clear as the water in the stream.

If any thoughts drift into your mind, imagine yourself breathing them out so that each thought flows downstream, like leaves on the current.

Allow your thoughts to drift away from you, like leaves floating downstream, until your mind becomes empty again - only filled by the image of crystal clear water.

## Sorting Thoughts Into Boxes

Don't try to change anything about your breathing, just notice the sensations of breathing air into and out of your body.

Try to focus all of your attention on your breathing.

As you breathe, you may notice that a thought comes to mind, or you may become aware of a sensation, or experience an emotion of some kind.

Continue breathing and noticing thoughts, sensations, and emotions as they come into your awareness.

Now, imagine that your mind contains three boxes. One box is labelled "Thoughts", one box is labelled "Sensations", and one box is labelled "Emotions".

Continue focusing on your breathing and if anything else comes into your awareness, observe whether it is a thought, a sensation, or an emotion and imagine sorting it into the right box.

Continue clearing your mind of any thoughts, sensations, or emotions by putting each in their correct box.

Keep noticing and sorting until you drift off.

## Paul Mckenna's WORRY BUSTER

This exercise is best practiced during the day rather than at night, but it is still very useful.

Read the instructions all the way through once - then go back through each step in order...

Think about something you have been worrying about.

Ask yourself: 'What is the positive intention of this worry? What does it do for me, get me or give me?' Very often, the answer will simply be some variation on 'to keep me safe'.

When you've got an answer that feels right to you, ask your mind to come up with at least three new ways that you could get all the positive benefit of the worry without having to take on the stress and uncomfortable feelings.

Check to make sure that you are completely comfortable with taking on these new alternatives to worrying. If there is any hesitation, go back to your mind and ask it to sort out any internal conflicts. You will know you're ready to move on when you are feeling completely at peace with your new alternatives.

Imagine what it will be like doing those new things instead of worrying in the future until it

seems as if that's what you've always done.

### Very Important Note about these techniques.

Eventually we all need to deal with the reasons for anxiety provoking or stressful thoughts. When you're trying to sleep it's fine to push them away temporarily, but it's not a long term solution.

Stress, anxiety and worry are all very natural and appropriate responses that everyone experiences at one time or another. Unfortunately, for many reasons, people sometimes become overly stressed or anxious when it isn't appropriate, and this becomes inconvenient, even overwhelming.

Hypnotherapy can help you to change this and develop much healthier and positive habits to put you back in control of your life.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call 01752 218575 or email [davidholmeshypnotherapy@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:davidholmeshypnotherapy@blueyonder.co.uk)