

23 steps to deeper sleep

Produced by LifeTools (<http://www.lifetools.com>), suppliers of the astonishing MindLab Proteus, which uses pulsed light and sound to create profound relaxation, a more focused mind for learning, and includes sleep sessions too.

- **Five to ten percent of the population – and twice as many women as men – regularly lie awake into the small hours**
- **Insomniacs under-estimate the amount of time they are really asleep**
- **Don't worry, it's all in the mind – lack of sleep is not going to kill you, but worrying about it could make you ill**

Tips for a good night's sleep

- **Take a long hot bath** – a shower will keep you clean, but it will do nothing to help you unwind. Fill the bath with lots of comfortably hot water and soak. Sprinkle three drops of lavender or clary sage essential oils into the water or put a few drops in a room diffuser. Afterwards settle down in bed with a session of the MindLab Proteus. Researchers at Michigan State University interviewed 45 insomnia sufferers who took a 30-minute bath two hours before going to bed. They all reported falling asleep more quickly waking fewer times and feeling more alert during the day.
- **Drink camomile tea, or hot milk** – avoid caffeine-filled drinks after 5pm. Sleep deprived people tend to drink an unhealthy amount of tea and coffee during the day just to keep themselves going. Far from helping, an excess of caffeine increases irritability during the day – and then fuels sleep problems at night.
- **Avoid too much alcohol** – although you might drop off to sleep quickly, it is a stimulant and you'll soon be wide awake again. Any sleep you do get will be shallow and broken.
- **No large meals before bedtime** – although there is no hard evidence to prove it, certain foods are thought to disturb sleep, either because they are stimulants or because they are hard to digest. If you have trouble sleeping, it's also best to avoid sugary desserts, and spicy or fatty foods close to bedtime. Always try to eat at least two hours before going to bed.
- **Stop any demanding work several hours before bedtime.** Use the Release the Day session on the MindLab Proteus.
- **Open a window or turn down the heating before you go to bed.** When you sleep you exhale toxins and carbon dioxide from your lungs. In a closed room you re-inhale the toxins and the carbon dioxide, which is also poisonous. If it's cold, just open the window a little and put an extra blanket on the bed.
- **Take a good long walk before bedtime, then use one of the relaxing sessions of MindLab Proteus.** Exercise will help you sleep, particularly those exercises which help you relax ie yoga, tai chi, alternate nostril breathing, abdominal breathing etc). Pick an exercise you enjoy and try to do it for at least half an hour every day – even a walk helps. But avoid vigorous exercise late in the evening, as this may over stimulate your body and brain.
- **Stretch your body** for one minute before retiring – gently, comfortably, to the sides and then to the floor. (Bend your knees as you come up). Stand on your toes and try to reach the ceiling. Stretching just makes you feel better. You'll sleep more restfully and soundly, especially combined with a session on the MindLab Proteus. You'll also spring into action faster the next morning.
- **Set your alarm clock for the same time each morning** – it's important to get up at about the same time every day, including weekends and holidays, to help your circadian cycles (your body's internal clock) maintain a regular rhythm. These rhythms start to prepare you for the day early in the morning by increasing the body temperature to make you feel more alert, and at night they lower body temperature so you become slightly befuddled.
- **Talk over your problems** – don't take them to bed with you
- **Use your bedroom as a retreat** – only for use as a place for rest and relaxation. Don't make telephone calls or do work-related reading in bed. Get into bed and relax, listening to music or a session of the MindLab Proteus.
- **Sex is an aid to sleep** – need we say more?
- **Change the position of your bed** – the ancient Chinese art of Feng Shui stresses the importance of furniture and interior design in your home – see latestarticles in popular magazines, courses you can attend.

- **Self-help acupressure** – press each point for at least two minutes before you go to bed. 1) *Inner gate*: middle of inside of forearm, two and a half finger widths (about an inch) from the wrist crease. 2) *Spirit gate*: inside of wrist crease, in line with the little finger (gates 1 and 2 can be pressed simultaneously). 3) *Third eye*: between the eyebrows, in the indentation where the nose meets the forehead. 4) *Sea of tranquillity*: centre of breastbone, three thumb widths up from the base of the bone.
- **Finger cradling and knee holding** – your own that is. Pam Fry is a nurse and practitioner of High Touch Jin Shin, an energy-balancing body system that uses acupuncture meridians. She has found these two simple techniques, done while lying in bed, to have helped her patients, and herself, slip off to sleep.

Finger cradling – Begin by holding the thumb of one hand by wrapping the other hand gently around it – so gently that you can still slip the thumb in and out. Hold this thumb for three to five minutes, then do the same for your index finger, and so on. According to Jin Shin, there is an emotion related to each finger, from worry to perfectionism to anger. People tend to fall asleep holding the finger that represents their own issue.

Knee holds – Lie on your side in a semi-foetal position and put your hands back to back between your knees. Place the palm of your right hand on the inside of your left knee and the palm of your left hand on the inside of your right knee. According to Jin Shin, this technique almost always will put people to sleep because it helps bring down the energy that's usually stuck up in the head when we worry and think too much.

How much sleep do you really need?

People's sleep requirements vary widely. Some apparently manage well on as little as three hours a night; others seem to need nine hours or longer. Our ancestors only went to sleep when darkness fell.

As we get older, we need less sleep. It is important to find out how much sleep is right for you and to be flexible about it. It is easy to get into a vicious circle where worrying about not sleeping becomes a cause for your sleeplessness. Professor Jim Home, Director of the Sleep Research Laboratory at Loughborough University says, "Most insomniacs get six hours sleep a night, which is quite sufficient."

What else can you do?

Sleeping patterns are a habit and habits can be changed. Here are some other suggestions on how you can change your bedtime routine:

- **Go to bed an hour earlier.** It may seem uncomfortable at first, but stick with it. One good night's sleep has little effect. You need at least two before you start to feel better. Within a few weeks, you'll have new and healthier habits. In two weeks you'll see benefits to your hair, skin, eyes, muscle tone, mood and energy. Nothing promotes healing and wellbeing as fast as sleep.
- **Be in bed by nine (if only once a week)** and this investment will have remarkable pay-offs. You will awaken more refreshed than on days when you stay up later. Remember, the hours you sleep before midnight at the most valuable. When you sleep your body regenerates its nerve energy, and with abundant energy it carries out all its processes more effectively. That means you feel better.
- **Keep a diary of your daily activities and sleep experiences** and, once you recognise a pattern that may trigger your insomnia, set yourself a personal strategy for avoiding it. If you can't pinpoint the reason for your sleeplessness, see your GP. Your insomnia could be linked to a medical problem eg asthma, anaemia, high blood pressure, diabetes, PMT and irritable bowel syndrome. "You need to approach your sleep problem in a logical way," says Dr Kevin Morgan, a psychologist at the University of Sheffield. "Assess the cause of before trying any cure. insomnia, set yourself a personal strategy for avoiding it."
- **Avoid staying up to watch late TV** – tape it and watch it at a more reasonable hour
- **Don't do too much before going to bed** – make a list, it will be there tomorrow
- **Never get off to sleep early anyway** – you won't if you don't go to bed.
- **Power-napping** – becoming more and more popular, particularly with high flyers. Relax while you're wide awake! The idea is to relax and rejuvenate yourself, while staying alert. A few minutes of power napping can be as restorative as several hours' sleep. But you need the right equipment to power nap correctly. Use the MindLab Proteus to rejuvenate and refresh you ready for Peak Performance, Relaxation, Learning and Well Being.

How can a light and sound device (like the MindLab Proteus) help you to sleep better?

Like a lot of people, you've probably had difficulty getting to sleep at the end of a stressful day, when your

mind is overactive and your body tense....

If you talk with friends about it, you'll find that everyone has their own pet suggestion for helping you get to sleep – ranging from chanting a mantra to counting sheep – and these ideas are often very valuable. However you'll get much more out of them if you combine them with a mind machine session.

You see most of the techniques for getting to sleep need you to “turn off” your mind for them to work – but if you could turn your mind off, you wouldn't need the technique to get you off to sleep...

However there are specific MindLab sessions that can't fail to gently ease your mind out of its futile looping – and after that you're in the ideal state for sleep.

The sessions you'd use for sleep are Deep Relaxation, Goodnight and Release the Day, more of which later. Whichever you choose, though, there are two different ways to go about things.

1. Use the session while you're in bed ready for sleep – so you go straight off to sleep. This may seem obvious, but a lot of people worry about nodding off with their goggles on and breaking them. This never happens, they're flexible plastic and, anyway, your subconscious knows what's going on – most people wake up with their goggles stowed safely beside them.

2. Use the session to prepare for sleep. This way you get ready for bed, but do the session sitting in a chair. At the end you go to bed immediately – and you should be asleep within moments. The trick with this method is to sit up straight in the chair: if you lie back you're liable to fall asleep where you are, which probably isn't what you intend.

Here's how we think you might like to use some of the sessions to help you get, but remember, these aren't rules. With the MindLab Proteus, it's your experience that counts – so follow your feelings.

Deep Relaxation MindLab Proteus session (25 minutes)

Of course you can indulge in this session anytime you feel like letting go and going with the flow – we particularly recommend it for newcomers to the Proteus. Probably you'll just want to draw within and enjoy this, but you can, if you want, enhance it with a little autogenic or progressive relaxation. More simply, after the first few minutes of a session, picture each limb in turn and feel how heavy it is becoming, then notice how your breathing is calming....

This isn't a session designed specifically for getting you to sleep, as it ends on an “up beat”, bringing you out refreshed and ready for life. But, using this will give you such an enhanced sense of well-being, that you may well find that you sleep more deeply than ever before...

Goodnight (18 minutes)

Short but sweet, this is a good session to use lying down in bed, ready to drift off – especially when you're mentally ready for sleep but your body still seems to be rushing through the day! Again, it's probably best just to set the lights on low, let go and enjoy the show ... but if your mind insists on doing something then gently alternate the focus of your attention between the lights and sounds.

Release the Day (22 25 minutes)

If your mind keeps on replaying the day – what you should have said, or done, or not done – this is the session for you. Set the lights to low or moderate, then lie back ... and don't deliberately try to stop thinking about the day, just experience the session, and you should gradually free yourself of the day's baggage.

If your mind insists on thinking about the day, though, you can release your thoughts into the light or sound: when you see that action replay let it dissolve into the lights; when you hear that conversation again let it blend into the sounds....

Combined techniques:

Visualisation

Affirmation/mantras

Other tapes/CDs which will help you unwind

Deep Meditation and Egg of Time tapes are especially useful for relaxed listening before and even when you are in bed. We have many other relaxation tapes and CDs in stock – visit the shopping section of our site at <http://www.lifetools.com>.

Short term solutions

Sleeping pills can be effective in the short-term (although they can have a nasty hangover effect) but they are not a long-term solution because of their strongly addictive qualities. Instead, try a herbal preparation, such as passiflora or valerian, both of which have been shown to improve sleep.

Melatonin, a natural hormone that's being hailed in the US as the new insomnia cure, is now available on prescription here. And a new study highlighting the benefits of fluorescent treatment reports that 16 insomniacs all had better-quality sleep after exposure to intervals of bright light.

“But there are no instant cures, as yet,” says Professor Hindmarch, Professor of Human Psychopharmacology at Surrey University. Most insomniacs underestimate the length of time they sleep. “The feeling of getting no sleep at all is often unfounded,” says Professor Jim Home, Director of the Sleep Research Laboratory at Loughborough University. “Most insomniacs get six hours' sleep a night, which is quite sufficient.”

Alternative help for sleeplessness

Homoeopathy

- Nux vomica 30c – for people who experience insomnia as a result of mental strain or withdrawal from drugs who wake around 3am, then fall asleep just as dawn breaks.
- Chamomilla 30c – for a sleepless child who wants to be carried around.
- Ignatia 30c – for people with a fear of insomnia, who get nightmares when asleep.

Guidelines: take your dosage one hour before bedtime for ten nights; repeat the dose if you wake during the night and are unable to fall asleep again. Do not take homoeopathic medicines within 20 minutes of food, drink or toothpaste.

Vitamins

100-1500mg (check) of calcium with 200-500mg of magnesium before bedtime. Do not take a B vitamin supplement late in the day. For restless legs, take 10-40mg of folic acid daily, with an average dose of vitamin B12. Both restless legs and night cramp often respond to Tissue Cals Combination P, a range of homoeopathically prepared mineral salts, available in chemists and healthfood stores. (Reflexology can also be helpful). GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) is a regulator of neurone activity; some people who experience anxiety and depression lack it. A natural calming agent for the brain, GABA (available from health food stores) may be helpful for insomnia; 20mg-40mg daily, dissolved under the tongue.

Herbal medicine

Valerian speeds up the onset of sleep and improves its quality without subsequent drowsiness or lack of dream recall. Skullcap and passion flower can also be helpful. You can make up an infusion of any of these herbs in the way you would make a cup of tea. Place 30g of the dried herb or 75g of the fresh herb in a teapot. Pour on hot water (just off the boil). Leave to infuse for 10 minutes, then strain through a nylon sieve or strainer into a tea cup. Store the rest in a jug in a cool place. Standard dosage is one cupful three times a day, drunk hot or cold, but not too close to bedtime. Chamomile, a mild sedative, is more readily available in tea bag form.

Remember that it's possible to become psychologically dependent on any sedative, so only use for a limited period.

Herbal pillows can also be useful – you'll find them at some good retailers.

Stress and sleep

If stress is the problem, you need to discover relaxation techniques that work for you – anything from yoga and aromatherapy to massage, mind machines, relaxation tapes and herbal teas.

Around half of all cases of insomnia are caused by stress and anxiety. And, for some the anxiety is due to underlying depression. “A recent US study found that 32 per cent of insomniacs were depressed,” says Dr Chris Idzikowski, Chairman of the British Sleep Society.

If all else fails

If absolutely everything you try fails to work then use the early hours as a time for creative work, for receiving inspiration, for meditation or praying. “For me, 4 am is a wonderful time,” says yoga guru Liliias Folan. “The Taoists believe that the energies of the night are turning to prepare for waking up, and many people do wake up around three or four in the morning.”

Have a good night.

How to creatively use your sleep time

When you do finally get to sleep there are many ways you can use your sleep time. There may be a problem playing on your mind, but one which you cannot find the solution to. As you think about your problem, pour yourself a glass of water, drink half of it before you go asleep then when you wake up the next morning drink the remaining half. With luck the problem has been solved by your sub-conscious in your sleep, and drinking the remaining water will trigger your conscious mind into remembering the solution.

Artists, musicians and authors through the ages have used their sleep time creatively and often come up with ideas for great works of genius while asleep. Follow their example by keeping a notepad and pencil by your bed ready for when you awake, don't trust yourself to remember and write it down later, because you won't.

Thomas Edison, the inventor, first came up with ideas for his inventions in his sleep. He used to sit dozing in a chair holding a steel ball in his hand, which in turn was suspended over a steel plate. Each time he fell asleep and dropped the ball onto the plate it would wake him and he'd write down the ideas he'd had in his sleep!

Another method for you to try is to sit or lie down with your arm in the air, each time you drop off to sleep your arm will automatically drop, causing you to wake with a start. Write down what your subconscious mind tells you. We wouldn't recommend that you did this every night of the week, but a very interesting experiment!

Experience lucid dreaming now

Lucid dreaming really warrants a report in itself. It is the experience of realising you are dreaming but of still being asleep. Once you realise you are dreaming you can direct the dream in any way you want. You will know it's a dream but the world around you will seem solid, and all your senses will be heightened. Lucid dreaming is like hi-tech virtual reality – but it's here today using the most sophisticated computer in the world: your brain. You can pinch yourself and feel pain, taste food, fly through the air, have romantic encounters – and more. Lucid dreaming was founded in 1988 by Stephen LaBerge, a research associate with Stanford University. He says he knows of several psychiatrists who use lucid dreaming as therapy for patients suffering from nightmares.

To bring lucid dreaming to a wider audience, LaBerge and his assistants at the Institute have developed an electronic home device designed to induce lucid dreams.

The Nova Dreamer is a remarkable device and available from LifeTools. See the website at <http://www.lifetools.com> for more info.