



Self-hypnosis for easier sleep

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Relaxing Self-Hypnosis for Easier Sleep

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Being able to relax and simply drift off to sleep can be an absolutely wonderful experience. Sometimes, though, it can seem like an insurmountable hurdle. But it's just a skill like any other skill that we repeat unconsciously every day. And it's a skill that we can teach ourselves.

If you're already a good sleeper, relaxing self-hypnosis can help you to enjoy sleeping even more deeply and comfortably. And if you're not, it can also help you to reclaim the healthy, fulfilling relationship you once had with sleep – however long ago that might seem.

So, whether you are having sleep problems, or just want to enjoy deeper, easier, more relaxing sleep, this little book can help you to achieve it.

In it, I explain how you can learn relaxing self-hypnosis for deep, easy sleep straight away, and show you some of the benefits that you can enjoy.

I just can't sleep

If you can't sleep, you're not alone. Around a third of the UK population experience significant periods of insomnia at some time in their lives, with up to 40% of adults suffering from temporary, short-term sleep disturbances, including:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Trouble staying asleep
- Waking too early
- Restlessness
- Anxious, disturbing dreams

And absolutely everyone knows what it's like to lie there staring wide-eyed into the dark on at least one occasion.

Sleep experts define insomnia as '*difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep*'. Acute, or short-term, insomnia can last just a few nights, while chronic insomnia is usually described as sleep that's disrupted at least three nights a week, for three months or more.

Acute or chronic, the results of poor sleep can have a devastating impact on health, wellbeing and life-satisfaction – especially when you're struggling to get through the day running on empty!

Poor sleep can have a debilitating consequence your health in general and even interfere with your immune system. The effects aren't just due to lack of sleep itself. We can also develop 'coping mechanisms' – little things to give us that much needed lift – that don't help either. I know I've often raided the biscuit-tin in search of a sugary energy-rush to get me through the day, or had a sneaky glass of wine simply to summon up enough oomph to go out for the evening.

What Can I Do?

First things first – there are several practical steps you can take that will help to re-establish regular sleep patterns, and which will improve the quality of your sleep even if you're already a good sleeper.

You have probably heard all of these before at one time or another, but it's worth going through them again to consider them as a whole, and whether they might be worth another try. Don't worry, we'll get to relaxing self-hypnosis in due course.

(If you do skip this bit, please try to remember to come back to it at some time in the future, because this stuff really does make a big difference if you put it into practice.)

The National Sleep Foundation has several recommendations for improving your sleep quality:

- Establish good 'sleep hygiene'
- Optimise your environment
- Quieten your mind

Establish good sleep hygiene

A bedtime routine means your body understands when it's time to sleep

If you always go to bed at the same time every day, and go through the same routine leading up to it, your body gets to realise that, 'This is when I'm supposed to fall asleep'. Train yourself to go to bed and to wake up at the same times each day.

Keep to this regular routine, even at weekends

A lie-in on Saturday or Sunday can disrupt your sleep-schedule and make it that much harder to get back into a regular cycle during the week.

Avoid daytime naps

If you absolutely can't function without one, limit it to fifteen or twenty minutes at most – set an alarm – and avoid doing it in the late afternoon or evening.

Eat a small bedtime snack

Avoid having a big meal within 3 or 4 hours of bedtime, but don't go to bed hungry, either. Anything sugary is a bad idea – it will send your blood-sugar on a roller-coaster and disrupt the quality of your sleep. Instead, try something like a banana or unsalted nuts, or a couple of wholegrain crackers with peanut butter or cheese. The traditional hot, milky drink is perfect, too.

Avoid drinking caffeine after mid-afternoon, or alcohol late at night

Caffeine is, of course, a stimulant widely used to keep you awake. Alcohol can seem like a useful nightcap – as the word implies – but in practice, it can disrupt your natural sleep-cycle and lead to poor quality sleep. Avoid it for at least an hour before bedtime.

Oh, and while hydration is a good thing, water before bedtime can mean waking in the early hours to go to the bathroom, so taper off consumption as you go into the evening.

Get daily exercise, but avoid night-time workouts

Regular exercise, especially if it's outdoors in daylight, will improve your natural body-clock, and help you to fall asleep and improve sleep quality. It increases blood flow and alertness though, so avoid strenuous exercise for at least 3 hours before you go to bed. If you feel you need something to release tension, try slow yoga or gentle stretches instead.

Make day and night as different as different

Speaking of your natural body-clock, make sure yours is working efficiently by making your days as different from your nights as is practical for you.

Make your days as bright as possible. Pull back the curtains as soon as you wake up and get outside into natural daylight as early, and as often, as you can. Walking or even just sitting outside to eat your lunch would be great. Be active and take enough exercise during the day to make you pleasantly tired.

In the evening, dim your lights as much as is practically possible – especially when you're just sitting and relaxing. Plan quiet activities and build in relaxing elements such as taking a warm bath, doing some gentle yoga, and listening to soothing music.

At night, make the room you sleep in as dark as you can, or use a sleep mask over your eyes to cut out light. Aim for pitch black darkness. If you get up in the night, keep the lights a dim as is safe for you to do so to avoid waking yourself up too much. Keep distractions like laptops and phones out of the bedroom. To be honest, the more boring the room is, the better – at least until you've recovered your natural sleep rhythm.

Optimise your environment

If at all possible, sleep in a cool, clean, dark, quiet room

Try to keep the room temperature at or below 21°C (70°F). When you're asleep, your body temperature naturally drops, so a higher temperature makes it think you should be up and doing.

Try, too, to keep your bedroom clear of dust and fluff which could act as a mild irritant to your airways, preventing you from breathing comfortably and disturbing your sleep.

As outlined above, keep the room as dark as you possibly can – the darker the better – as any light at night disturbs your body-clock.

And keep it just for sleep

The more you can associate your bedroom solely with relaxation and sleep the more likely you are to feel calm there. Don't work there, use social media, eat, watch films, or study.

Additionally, if you wake in the night and can't get back to sleep, get up and go to another room where you can read for a bit, for example, rather than lie awake building up the association of wakefulness.

Avoid bright lights two hours before bedtime

As we've seen, bright light tells your body that it's daytime, which stops it releasing hormones that help you to fall asleep. Turn off any bright overhead lights in your main room and use dim mood lighting instead.

Avoid screens, too

Try to stay away from your phone, laptop or any other screens for at least an hour before you go to bed. Most screens emit blue light, which fools your body into believing it's the middle of the day, instead of the evening. If using them is unavoidable, at least apply a filter app or dim the screen.

E-readers are okay - they don't emit blue light - but do tone down the brightness.

Try wearing earplugs

If constant, inescapable noise is a problem, or if you feel you're always on the alert for sounds, earplugs could provide relief - either simple noise-cancelling ones, or try a soothing soundscape to help you drift off.

Use white noise

Even if earplugs aren't your thing, you can still try using a source of constant, unobtrusive sound to help you ignore noisy neighbours or busy traffic.

You can find white noise or ambient sound apps, but something like a small fan whirring away in the background can work just as well.

Hide the time

Resist the temptation to keep checking the time when you can't fall asleep, or if you wake in the night. Put clocks, watches and even your phone where you can't see them.

Checking the time can easily turn into a countdown – five hours until you have to get up; four hours until you have to get up; three hours... you get the idea.

Try a sleep mask

If light is a problem – street lights, for example, or early-morning sunlight – an eye-mask can help if you can't hang heavy, light-blocking curtains.

Quieten your mind

If worry or anxiety is the main problem preventing you from getting to sleep - or waking you up in the night or early hours of the morning - you can add soothing elements to your daily and night-time routines to calm your nervous system and allow your natural sleep mechanisms to re-establish themselves.

Keep a journal

At least an hour before bedtime, get everything that bothers you out of your head and into your journal to help you put your worries aside.

Imagine that you are unspooling all these worries from your mind and laying them down onto the paper.

Put your thoughts aside

If your worries become intrusive, practice putting them to one side. Acknowledge their existence, but rise above them and don't allow yourself to get drawn in – like an onlooker in an argument.

It can help to repeat an affirmation to yourself - something like: "It's just a thought and I am not my thoughts", or, "There is no need for me to worry about xx, so I will think about (a pleasant thought or memory) instead".

If it's something you can do something about, then do it as soon as possible and get it out of the way.

Distract yourself

We have random thoughts all the time. Sometimes your mind is just idling and picks up a worry simply as something to focus on.

If you find your yourself dwelling on your worries, redirect your thoughts to a "go to" pleasant one. Have several ready – happy memories, a favourite story or film, thoughts about a hobby, they all make good distractions.

Actively relax

Build conscious relaxation into your bedtime routine. Take a warm bath, meditate, do gentle stretches, listen to soothing music, or read for about 30 minutes before you go to bed. Creating a calming bedtime routine means your body will know when it's time to relax and wind down.

Mind your language

Watch how you talk to yourself. If you label yourself "an insomniac", and keep on telling yourself that you "can't sleep", or that you "won't sleep", the less likely you are to get back into your natural bodily rhythm and sleep cycle.

Your mind really does believe every word you say to it. So even if you can't quite bring yourself to say that you'll sleep deeply and well, you can at least tell yourself, "I can rest," and, "I can go to bed and be comfortable", or even, "I'm looking forward to resting comfortably tonight".

What else can I do?

If you try all the suggestions above and give them a decent chance, you should find things improve as you begin to get back into a natural cycle of sleeping and waking.

However, if these simple measures aren't enough, you can take a more radical approach and see if a combination of progressive relaxation and self-hypnosis for sleep works as well for you as it has for others – me included.

Relaxing self-hypnosis is a natural treatment that reduces over-thinking and promotes relaxation. For sleep problems, relaxing self-hypnosis can help you to unwind and encourages quicker, deeper and better quality sleep.

I'll teach you a couple of exercises that will help you to prepare your mind for deep relaxation and sleep – one for you to use during the day so that you can accustom your mind to the sense of being calm and relaxed, and one to use at your normal bedtime so that you can drift off naturally to restful sleep.

There's also a third, powerful, technique you can add to turbo-charge your relaxation.

What's relaxing self-hypnosis?

Hypnosis is a state of deep relaxation and focused attention. Relaxing self-hypnosis also takes you through a progressive relaxation – relaxing each part of your body in turn, easing away any tension or stress and increasing your feelings of comfort.

Using hypnosis to treat sleep difficulties has been well researched, and the evidence behind this approach is growing. The technique is used by both clinicians and individuals because of its effectiveness and also its safety.

By encouraging relaxation and reducing overall levels of stress and anxiety – both during the day and at bedtime – relaxing self-hypnosis encourages a state of mind that's more attuned to letting go and drifting into a comfortable state of sleep. Small-scale studies have also identified an increase in slow-wave sleep, which is important for mental and physical rest and renewal.

Although different people have different levels of hypnotisability – some finding it very easy, while others take longer to relax and drift off – everyone can achieve some degree of benefit from it, and a willingness to be helped and a positive attitude greatly increase the level of success.

So, how do I do relaxing self-hypnosis?

The ability to calm and focus your mind is an invaluable skill, and relaxing self-hypnosis can help you to develop it.

There are two exercises here – one to do during the day to accustom your mind to focus on being calm and relaxed, and one to use when you go to bed so that you can drift off into a restful, comfortable sleep.

If you're experiencing sleep problems that have you waking up in the middle of the night, these exercises can also help you to get back to asleep as well.

Daytime exercise

Use this exercise when you have ten undisturbed minutes to close your eyes – maybe during your lunch or coffee break, or after work. You'll want to relax and give it your full attention, so don't attempt to do it while driving or doing anything that needs your full attention.

Find a comfortable place to relax

You can lie down if you like, but sitting works just as well as long as you are comfortable. You can be indoors or outdoors - anywhere where you won't be disturbed.

Stare at a spot in front of you

A spot on the wall or something in the distance is fine. Make it something just a little above your natural eyeline and gaze at it softly without focusing too hard.

Take three deep, slow breaths

Breathe through your nose – naturally, easily and deeply. As you breathe out the third breath, allow your eyes to gently close.

Focus on your forehead

Without straining your eyes in any way, just imagine that they are looking softly upwards at the inside of your own forehead.

Count slowly backwards from twenty-five down to zero

With each breath that you breathe out, count backwards down each number and say to yourself in your own mind, "Calm and relaxed":

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Twenty-five... calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Twenty-four... calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Twenty-three... calm and relaxed."

And so on, all the way down to zero:

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Two... calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "One... calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Zero... calm and relaxed."

Count to ten to 'wake up'

You won't be asleep, but you might not be in a completely alert state so you need to 'wake up' fully.

When you get to zero, take one deep, slow breath in and out then count up from one up to ten at a normal rate. When you reach ten, say to yourself, "Waking up now, relaxed, refreshed and alert", and open your eyes:

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Zero... calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly

Breathe in and begin counting from one up to ten, letting your breath return to its normal rate, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Waking up now, relaxed, refreshed and alert".

Open your eyes

Take a few moments to re-orientate yourself, then go on with your day, calm and relaxed.

Bedtime exercise

Remember the basics of sleep hygiene we talked about earlier and make your environment, your routine and your mindset as favourable for sleep as you possibly can.

To recap on some of the highlights:

- **Make day and night different from each other** - your days light, bright and active; and your nights dark, quiet and restful
- **Keep to a regular timetable** – go to bed and get up at the same times every day, and avoid daytime naps
- **Have a soothing bedtime routine** – turn off your screens and enjoy a warm bath, some gentle stretches or yoga, and a quiet read with maybe some relaxing music
- **Have a light snack** – have bigger meals early to avoid eating too close to bedtime, but include a light snack just before bed to stop you getting hungry in the night. A banana or hot milk are ideal because they also include tryptophan, a natural sleep-promoting amino acid
- **Journal** – get any worries, concerns or any other nagging thoughts out of your head and down onto paper

Use the following exercise when you're ready to settle down to go to sleep.

Focusing in succession on the different areas of your body that might be holding tension, and releasing it gently, will cause changes in your neural system that will lead you into relaxation and then gently into sleep.

Lie down comfortably

Make any adjustments to lighting, temperature, sound and any other aspects of your comfort before you begin. Don't say, "It doesn't matter", or, "I'll do it in a minute", because it will only nag away at you and prevent you from relaxing completely.

Take three deep, slow breaths

Breathe through your nose – naturally, easily and deeply. As you breathe out the third breath, allow your eyes to gently close.

Focus on your forehead

Without straining your eyes in any way, just imagine that they are looking softly upwards at the inside of your own forehead.

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply

Concentrate on your chest and the way the breath feels as it enters and leaves your body. Imagine your body relaxing into the mattress as each breath flows slowly into and out of your body.

See if you can notice your stomach moving with each breath. Don't force it, just allow your breathing to continue comfortably, easily and effortlessly.

Release tension from your body

Start with your toes. With each breath that you breathe in, gently tense each part of your body in turn. As you breathe out, release the tension and say to yourself in your own mind, "My toes are calm and relaxed":

Continue to move your awareness up through your body, gently tensing then releasing the tension - feet, ankles, lower legs, knees, upper legs, hips, back, front, shoulders, fingers, hands, lower arms, elbows, upper arms, neck, back of the head, jaw, and finally your face.

Breathe in slowly and gently tense your toes

Breathe out slowly, releasing the tension and saying to yourself, "My toes are calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly and gently tense your feet

Breathe out slowly, releasing the tension and saying to yourself, "My feet are calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly and gently tense your ankles

Breathe out slowly, releasing the tension and saying to yourself, "My ankles are calm and relaxed."

Continue going right the way through your body, all the way up to your face:

Breathe in slowly and gently tense the back of your head

Breathe out slowly, releasing the tension and saying to yourself, "My head is calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly and gently tense your jaw

Breathe out slowly releasing the tension and saying to yourself, "My jaw is calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly and gently tense your face

Breathe out slowly, releasing the tension and saying to yourself, "My face is calm and relaxed."

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply

If you are still awake, continue to breathe slowly and deeply, imagining your body getting heavier with every breath out, settling more and more comfortably into the mattress.

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Calm and relaxed", feeling more and more comfortable

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Calm and relaxed", feeling more and more comfortable

Go on until you forget to continue.

If you have gone all the way through and you're still not feeling sleepy, it's best to get up and go into a different room if possible. Do something relaxing like reading or listening to calming music for about twenty minutes or half an hour, then return to bed and go through the exercise again.

It's important that you begin to associate your bed with feeling sleepy and relaxed, not with lying awake.

Practice these exercises. Although they seem quite easy, they can take a little time to get used to, so don't worry if they don't work overnight. You'll get better at them over time, and after a while, you'll find you can fall asleep more easily and sleep better every night.

What else can you tell me?

Here's a third, powerful, exercise that you can add to help you feel even more relaxed, calm and ready for sleep.

Using scent to reach your relaxing happy place

You can use a favourite fragrance to 'remind' your neural system what it's like to feel relaxed and calm.

You can use any scent for this – a pillow-spray is good, or a lavender spray which has an inherently relaxing scent. Don't, however, use your normal, everyday scent or body spray. Make sure it's something that you can associate only with bedtime and sleeping.

Relax

Have your chosen fragrance ready to hand.

Find somewhere comfortable where you won't be disturbed and go through the Daytime Exercise down to:

Breathe out slowly saying to yourself, "Zero... calm and relaxed."

Breathe in slowly

Breathe out slowly

Feel deeply relaxed and calm.

Visualize a relaxing place

Begin to imagine the most relaxing place you can think of - a summer beach, a spring meadow, a garden on a beautiful day, sitting by a warm fire in a cosy cottage.

It can be real or fantasy. Immerse yourself in it, focusing all your attention on the colours, sounds, textures, temperatures, scents, and even tastes - remember or imagine as much as you possibly can about what it feels, smells, and sounds like. The more detailed you can make it, the better – make it as real as possible.

Fix the memory

Keep remembering or imagining the details until they are at their highest intensity, and while you are enjoying all the lovely feelings of happiness and relaxation, take your chosen fragrance and breathe the scent in deeply, taking a few deep, slow breaths.

Let the image fade naturally

Put the fragrance down. Continue to imagine your scene for the length of a couple of slow breaths, then let it fade naturally.

Count to ten to 'wake up'

When you're ready, begin counting from one up to ten to 'wake up', letting your breathing return to normal.

When you reach ten, say to yourself, "Waking up now, relaxed, refreshed and alert".

Open your eyes

Take a few moments to re-orientate yourself, then go on with your day.

Using the scent

When you go to bed, spray the fragrance, or put a drop of it, onto your pillow. Breathe it in and take a few moments to go to your relaxing place again.

Scent goes straight to the memory-centres of the brain, so you will find yourself relaxing deeply as your neural system remembers how calm and relaxed you were while you pictured the scene and breathed in the scent, and recreates that feeling in your body.

Go through your Bedtime Exercise while the fragrance wafts you to your relaxing place and on into sleep.

So there you have it.

Knowing what the basics of good sleep are, means that you can develop some sound habits that will help your body-clock and neural system work as efficiently as they possibly can.

Couple that with a little self-hypnosis, and you have a powerful recipe for achieving the quality of sleep you need to live life to the full and be your most vibrant, energetic self.

Follow all these tips and exercises, and you should soon be enjoying a deep, comfortable, relaxing night's sleep.

Good night

Sleep tight

End note

Hypnotherapy and self-hypnosis are very successful in treating sleep disorders and restoring healthy, natural sleep. However, if you experience sleep difficulties for a prolonged period of time, you should consult a medical professional to make sure there is no underlying health condition causing your insomnia.

Sleep problems can sometimes be associated with physical health issues which may respond better to other forms of treatment.

