

Sleep Protocol: Getting to Sleep, Getting Back to Sleep

Develop good habits that prepare you for sleep

1. Set regular schedule to go to bed and get up. Stick to the schedule even if you are up a lot at night.
2. Develop regular rituals to move yourself toward sleep: no big meals or caffeine hours before sleep time; exercise during the day but no exercise hours before sleep time; “Move toward calm” with brushing teeth, dressing for bed, turning down the covers, saying prayers, etc. all in the same order.
3. Make bed as comfortable, calming and safe as possible. Use the bed only for sleep: do not read, watch television or talk on the phone in bed. Make your bed for sleep only.
4. In each moment move yourself toward desiring sleep -- willingly. Notice, and throw yourself into, tiredness.

Get to sleep (get back to sleep)

1. As soon as you notice you are awake, try to get back to sleep immediately. This is not a time to ponder, plan, ruminate or rehearse. Observe the urge and return to getting back to sleep.
2. Stay physically drowsy. If you move at all, move only once, gently so as not to wake yourself up. Do not turn on the light. Use relaxation techniques: (1) Scan your body in a calm and leisurely way, noticing and letting go any tension you find. Particularly attend to your face, forehead, scalp and shoulders. Try hearing words in your mind such as, “Shoulders...warm and heavy, arms...warm and heavy, legs...warm and heavy.”(2) Develop some calming and quieting images that promote safety, warmth and heaviness -- like lounging on a quiet beach in the sun. (3) Attend to your breathing. Count your breaths.
3. If you are making no progress toward getting to sleep after about 10 or 15 minutes, slowly and calmly get out of bed. Do not switch on the light or do anything active. Merely stand still, relaxing in the dark, with your mind as still as possible. Do not fight feelings of heaviness and drowsiness. Soon you will probably feel tired and will want to lie down. Return to bed, savoring your tiredness.

Control intrusive thoughts

1. Often what gets in the way of sleep are intrusive thoughts -- worrying or planning or anticipating or rehearsing. It is important to commit yourself to letting go all such thoughts. You must convince yourself that even if the cure for cancer suddenly comes to you, you must let it go while you are in bed. Cheerlead yourself: “Everything is as it should be now. There is no need for me to lie awake thinking. I can simply go to sleep.”
2. Set aside a quiet time just before bed, outside your bedroom, to do your worrying, planning, etc. Jot down any notes on thoughts or ideas you want to follow-up on. Do not dwell on any one thought or idea -- merely jot something down and put the idea aside.
3. Block intrusive thoughts while you are in bed by doing the following: immediately start saying the word “the” over and over, under your breath, with only the slightest movement of your tongue each time you say the word “the”. Repeat “the” at a comfortable rate, 2 or 3 times per second. If you also have intrusive images, try moving your eyes as if you were following an irregular circle. Keep your eyes closed, and follow the circle in a slow and lazy way. Try picturing a map of the United States and slowly move your eyes around the borders. If a thought intrudes, notice it non-judgementally and simply return to repeating “the” and following the circle. The unwanted thoughts will be blocked and you will soon drift off to sleep again.