

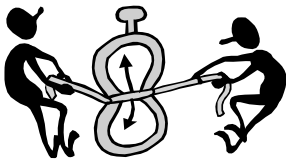
Adopting Beliefs and Attitudes that Contribute to Good Sleep

Your beliefs and attitudes about sleep can contribute to your insomnia. Your thoughts influence your emotions and, in turn, your emotional state also influences your sleep. For example, the more you worry about insomnia and worry about its potential consequences, the more this is likely to keep you awake at night. Changing your perception and appraisal of a problem (such as insomnia) can decrease emotional distress, which in itself will have a beneficial effect on your sleep. The goal here is not to deny or minimize your sleep difficulties and their impact on your daytime functioning; rather, you are encouraged to consider that some of your beliefs may be unhelpful, and that you might benefit from exploring alternative ways of thinking about sleep and insomnia. This handout outlines several steps you can take in that direction.

KEEP YOUR EXPECTATIONS REALISTIC

There is a widespread belief that 8 hours of sleep is an absolute necessity in order to feel refreshed and function well during the day. Another common belief is that we should always wake up in the morning feeling completely refreshed and full of energy. Concerns and worries arise when such expectations are not met, even though they are probably not realistic.

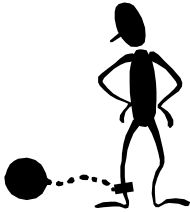
Sleep needs vary widely among each individual, and shorter sleep is not necessarily abnormal. Although the average sleep duration for *young* adults is between 7.5 and 8 hours per night, some natural ‘short sleepers’ can function quite well with 5 or 6 hours, whereas ‘long sleepers’ may need 9 to 10 hours to feel refreshed. There are also individual differences in how fast people fall asleep, how often they wake up, and the overall quality of their sleep. There is simply no ‘gold standard’ that everyone should aim for. Avoid placing undue pressure on yourself to achieve a certain standard, as this will only increase performance anxiety.



If you have a different sleep pattern from your bed partner, it does not necessarily mean that you have insomnia. Perhaps you envy your partner who can sleep through the night, but keep in mind that sleep patterns vary from person to person, and can even vary for the same person on different nights. After all, not everyone wears the same shoe size, is the same height, or weighs the same. It is best to avoid comparing your sleep pattern with that of others. There will always be someone who is taller, wealthier, or sleeps better than you. Avoid comparisons and acknowledge the advantages that arise from having lower sleep requirements. Think of the opportunities of having this spare time. The main message here is that a different or changing sleep pattern is not necessarily abnormal.

DON'T BLAME SLEEPLESSNESS FOR ALL YOUR MISFORTUNES

An assumption that many of us have is that disrupted sleep is necessarily detrimental to daytime functioning, mood, and health. The following examples illustrate some of these beliefs:



“Without an adequate night’s sleep, I can hardly function the next day.”

“When I feel irritable or tense during the day, it is because I haven’t slept well the night before.”

“I am concerned that insomnia may have serious consequences for my health.”

“I look terrible when I’ve slept poorly.”

Are these beliefs valid? If insomnia was the only culprit for such problems, then people who sleep well would never be stressed out, fatigued, irritable or depressed. It is easy to blame insomnia for all the things that go wrong during the day. However, it may not be the only culprit. It is possible that other factors can explain these difficulties. For example, stressors in other areas of your life (family, work) can also interfere with your ability to concentrate, have adequate energy, and how you function in the daytime. Examine these other contributors closely and deal with them directly.

It is also important to distinguish the impact of insomnia from that of sleep deprivation. Research has shown that complete sleep deprivation produces severe daytime sleepiness and impairs performance during the day. However, the consequences of insomnia are more limited, and affect mostly mood, attention, and motivation. Of course, if you worry about these deficits, they will appear worse than they are in reality; it will also increase your apprehension of insomnia the next night. So, be careful and try to go on with your day as usual even if you had a poor night of sleep.

In summary, although there are some consequences to insomnia, if you dwell on them too much, this will bring on more sleep difficulties. Blaming insomnia for all daytime problems is counterproductive. Examine other factors than sleep that may interfere with your energy, mood, and concentration during the day. Also, remember that nobody functions optimally every day. There are always variations in performance, alertness, and mood. Be careful: don’t blame it all on insomnia!

REVISE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CAUSES OF INSOMNIA

If you are like most people with sleep difficulties, you may have your own explanations about what is causing the problem. Examples of such explanations include:

“My insomnia is basically the result of a chemical imbalance.”

“If only I could get rid of this pain, my sleep would be fine.”

“If I did not have these hot flashes at night, I would not have sleep problems.”



The underlying assumption of such explanations is that you have little or no control over the causes of your sleep problems. It's like saying your insomnia could be cured if only you could overcome these problems. Although some of these attributions may be valid, they are essentially out of your control. Dwelling on them can lead to a sense of helplessness and of being a victim of insomnia, without the possibility of improvement.

Exclusive attribution of insomnia to external causes is self-defeating because you may have little control over changing these causes. For example, age, pain, and medical problems may make your sleep worse, but they are not the only cause of your insomnia. You need to distinguish the origins of your sleep problem from factors that maintain it over time. When insomnia is chronic, the precipitating factors have usually disappeared or simply cannot be changed. Insomnia is usually maintained over time by other factors such as your beliefs, thoughts, expectations, and behaviors. It is helpful to examine these factors which perpetuate the problem: those you can change. For example, the fear of not sleeping at night or the apprehension of the next day's consequences are often enough to keep you awake at night and these are the types of maintaining factors that, if changed, can improve your insomnia.

NEVER TRY TO SLEEP

"When I have trouble sleeping, I should just stay in bed and try harder."

"If I try hard enough, sleep will eventually come."

Sound familiar? These beliefs describe what most people do when sleep won't come: they just try harder. This is the worst mistake you can make, because sleep cannot be achieved on command. The more you try to sleep, the less you will succeed. It is possible to control the circumstances and attitudes that support good sleep, but not sleep per se. Whenever you try too hard to control or accomplish something, the attempt backfires and impairs performance: this is what is called performance anxiety. So, if sleep won't come, don't try to force it, it will just keep you awake.

DO NOT CATASTROPHIZE AFTER A POOR NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sometimes worrying turns into *catastrophic thinking*. Like a chain reaction, there is apprehension in the evening, then performance anxiety at bedtime, and finally a full-blown anxiety attack. Some people are concerned that insomnia may have serious consequences on their physical or mental health. Others think that not sleeping well is the worst thing that can happen. Finally, others are sure that insomnia is an indication of loss of control and complete chaos in their lives.

If you've been awake for hours or if you just had a sleepless night, don't panic; this will just make matters worse. Instead, ask yourself: 'What's the worst thing that can happen if I never get to sleep tonight?'. You might say: 'Sure, I'll be sleepy, but I'll deal with it tomorrow'. To de-catastrophize the situation always keep in mind that the most

predictable consequence of sleeplessness is sleepiness, and this can even help you get to sleep faster the next night. Moreover, one good night's sleep is usually enough to put you back in shape. If you fear that insomnia may damage your health, remind yourself that excessive worrying can be more detrimental to health than sleep loss.

The lack of explanation for a sleepless night is often the most distressing aspect of insomnia; it can reinforce the belief that sleep is unpredictable. It is, however, almost always possible to discover the reasons for a poor night's sleep. Carefully review your day and identify some possible causes of a poor night's sleep. A night of insomnia will seem less painful if you realize it is just the result of specific circumstances (a hard day at work, family conflicts).

DON'T PLACE TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON SLEEP

For some people thoughts and worries about sleep occupy a great deal of their time. They plan all their daytime activities based upon the quality and duration of their sleep. After a poor night of sleep some people call in sick or cancel appointments. Adopting such behavior reinforces the idea that you are a victim of your sleep problems. Moreover, you put even more pressure on yourself to get a decent night's sleep. This also reinforces the belief that insomnia is destroying your capacity to live life fully. Sleep is supposed to occupy only a third of your life. Ask yourself whether you may be giving it more importance than it deserves. Don't let insomnia run your life.

DEVELOP SOME TOLERANCE TO THE EFFECTS OF SLEEP LOSS



Instead of dwelling on insomnia and its effects on your life, perhaps try the alternative approach of developing some tolerance to sleep loss. After a bad night, try to stick with your usual routines and planned activities. This is not easy, but it will shift your attention away from sleeplessness. Doing this can even show you that daytime functioning is not entirely dependent on the previous night's sleep.

Whether you have trouble sleeping or not, life goes on. Try to develop some tolerance for sleep loss and its negative effects. Although insomnia can diminish your quality of life, you should not let it control your whole life. The objective is to maintain a more productive attitude so that you can function adequately and appreciate the good things in life in spite of your difficulties sleeping. You are not without hope!

In summary, we all have beliefs, attitudes, and expectations concerning sleep. Some are valid whereas others are false and feed the vicious cycle of insomnia. With time and effort, you can change your beliefs and attitudes and by doing so, improve your sleep. The goal is not to minimize your difficulties but to encourage you to develop

other ways of seeing things; this leaves you the opportunity to explore new ways of thinking.

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES THAT SUPPORT GOOD SLEEP

①	Keep realistic expectations. Sleep varies from person to person. There are advantages to less sleep.
②	Avoid blaming insomnia for all your problems. Try to identify other factors that may also be responsible.
③	Explore the causes of insomnia. Try to put emphasis on the factors that maintain insomnia and can be changed or controlled.
④	Do not try to sleep. Sleep comes more easily if you do not try to control it.
⑤	Do not catastrophize a poor night's sleep. The most predictable consequence of a poor night is increased sleepiness for the next night.
⑥	Do not put too much emphasis on sleep. Try not to give it too much importance and go about the day as if you slept well.
⑦	Develop some tolerance to the effects of a poor night's sleep. Try to plan some enjoyable/energy generating activities for the next day.