

**A GUIDE
TO**

**BETTER
SLEEP**



Malcolm Struthers
HYPNOTHERAPY



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INTRODUCTION

We spend around a third of our life asleep!

So you think we would be better at it.

Sleep is vital to all aspects of life. If your sleep suffers, so to does your performance, mood, and relationships with friends, family and colleagues. It impacts your ability to focus, your use of language, and your reading and listening skills. Sleep also is very important for the immune system and overall physical and mental wellbeing.

All too often we don't realise the importance of sleep until we have problems or issues. No doubt you have struggled through a day having only had a few hours' sleep and know the impact it has. The amount of sleep we all need is different for everyone though it is recommended that a healthy adult should sleep, on average, between seven and nine hours a night. However good sleep doesn't simply mean lots of sleep. It means the right kind of sleep and good quality sleep.

In this guide we will look at the different sleep stages, a bit about dreams, various sleep issues, the factors that can impact our sleep and what you can do to get better sleep. It also includes some interesting facts and figures and a simple way to monitor your sleep quality.

12% of people dream
entirely in black and white

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18845457/>



SLEEP STAGES

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You may have heard of circadian rhythms. These are 24-hour cycles that are a natural part of the body's internal clock. Running in the background, they carry out essential functions and processes. One of the most important and well-known circadian rhythms is the sleep-wake cycle.

We think of sleep as a peaceful and restful time. However, it is also a bit of a rollercoaster, as we go through different sleep stages and repeat this cycle throughout the night.

Sleep has been typically divided into four categories: awake, light, deep, and REM sleep. Sometimes you may see reference to five sleep stages, as both light and deep sleep can be divided into two stages, and/or the awake time isn't included as a stage. Also, you may see references to NREM and REM sleep - this simply refers to the stages with and without rapid eye movement.

Each one of these has a vital role in maintaining your mental and physical health. Each stage plays a different role in preparing your body for the next day.

It's thought that up to 15%
of the population are
sleepwalkers

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/parasomnias/sleepwalking>

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STAGE 0 - AWAKE

This is the time before and after we fall asleep or a natural break as we sleep. It includes those brief moments when we wake up during sleep. We all wake up throughout the night, many of us simply don't remember doing so, drifting off back to sleep quickly. Some people worry about waking up and think of this as broken sleep. As long as you are drifting back to sleep quickly and effortlessly, it is perfectly normal.

STAGE 1+2 - LIGHT SLEEP

This is when we are drifting into the deeper sleep stages. It is when your muscles relax. You may have that jerking sensation or feeling of falling at this point. Your respiration slows down, your heart rate decreases, and your body temperature drops. This is where sleep begins (or transitions between cycles). It is quite easy to wake up during this stage so even a minor disturbance can easily interrupt this stage.

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STAGE 3+4 - DEEP SLEEP

This is the stage that is focussed on restoration and repair. During this stage your blood pressure will drop as your body promotes muscle growth and repair. Blood flow increases to muscles, growth hormone is released and tissue growth and cell repair take place. The brain removes waste and shows long, slow brain waves. Waking up during this stage is more difficult. If you are woken up during deep sleep you will probably be disorientated or groggy. You have probably been woken up during deep sleep, unsure what is going on or where you are.

REM SLEEP

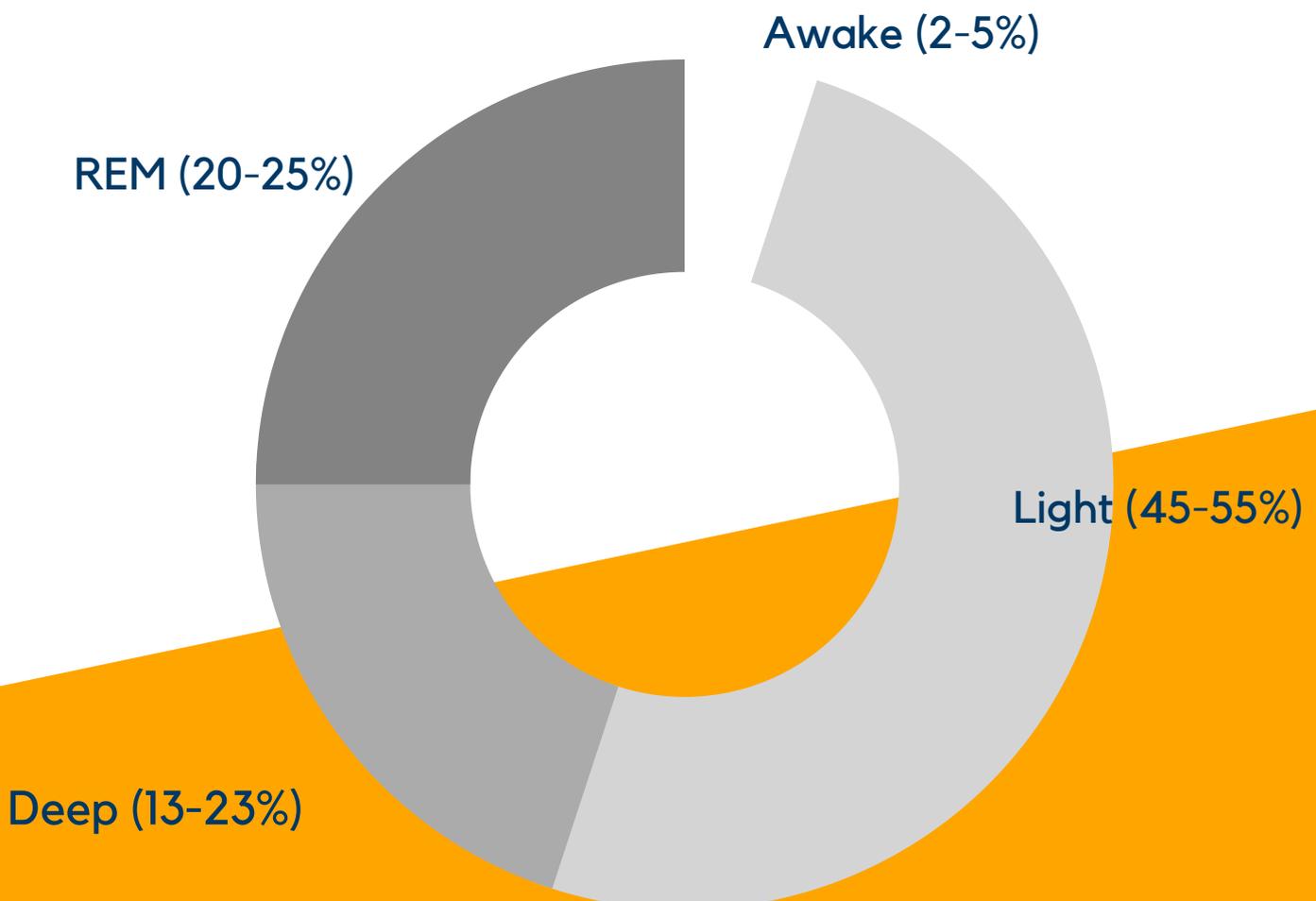
This is when your mind is re-energised with brain activity increasing again. Your respiration and heart rate are increased and your temperature regulation is off. This is when vivid dreams take place and brain activity is similar to that in waking. However, your muscles are virtually immobilized to stop you from acting out your dreams. During this stage your memory, learning, and problem-solving capacity benefit.

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You go through these stages in roughly 90-minute cycles. So during a good night's sleep, most people would go through four (six hours) or five (7.5 hours) 90-minute cycles. In general, each cycle moves through each stage - Wake - Light - Deep - REM and repeat

Though cycles earlier in the night will probably have more deep sleep, whereas late cycles will have more REM sleep.

Average time spent in each stage .



Though again it does vary from person to person.

Light

Stage 1&2

Guides you to the deeper stages

45-55%

Deep

Stage 3&4

Focussed on restoring your body

13-23%

Awake

Stage 0

A natural break in your sleep

2-5%

REM

Stage 5

Re-energizes your mind

20-25%



DREAMS



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As mentioned dreams occur in the REM stage of sleep. It is something that fascinates many people so I wanted to go into a bit more detail. A dream is simply a succession of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations that usually occur involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. Most people know how powerful dreams can be - sometimes impacting our mood the following day.

We all spend about two hours dreaming every night.

Each dream lasts around 5 to 20 minutes.

WHY DO WE DREAM

Sleep experts continually debate about why we dream. There are many different theories about the purpose of dreaming including:

- Building memory
- Processing emotion
- Mental housekeeping.
- Instant replay
- Incidental brain activity

Neuroscience and psychology experts continually conduct experiments to discover what is happening in the brain during sleep, but even with ongoing research, it may be that we never find out for sure exactly why we dream.

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NIGHTMARES

Nightmares are distressing dreams that cause many of us to feel a number of disturbing emotions. Common reactions to a nightmare include fear and anxiety. Both adults and children (and perhaps even animals) experience nightmares. Causes can include:

- stress
- fear
- trauma
- emotional difficulties
- illness
- use of certain medications or drugs

They are different from night terrors, which we will discuss later.

LUCID DREAMS

Lucid dreaming is when the dreamer is aware that they are dreaming and may have some control over their dream.

The measure of this control can vary. Lucid dreams often occur in the middle of a regular dream when the sleeping person realizes suddenly that they are dreaming.

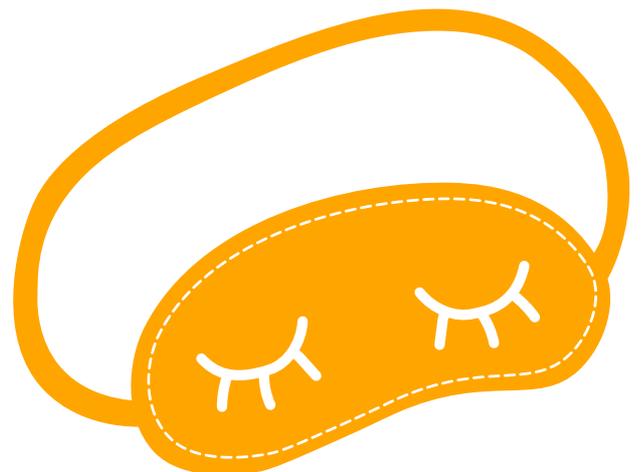
Some people experience lucid dreaming at random, while others have reported being able to increase their capacity to control their dreams.

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DREAM FACTS

- People spend an average of six years dreaming during their lifetime.
- Animals probably dream - Many think that when a sleeping dog wags its tail or when a sleeping cat swats its paws, it is dreaming.
- Unfortunately, negative emotions are more commonly experienced in dreams than positive ones.
- In one study of people who have been blind since birth, researchers found that they still seemed to experience visual imagery in their dreams, and they also had eye movements that correlated to visual dream recall.
- People from all over the world frequently dream about being chased, being attacked, or falling. Other common dream experiences include feeling frozen and unable to move, arriving late, flying, and being naked in public.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/facts-about-dreams-2795938>



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TIPS TO REMEMBER YOUR DREAMS

As much as 95% of all dreams are forgotten shortly after waking. So here are some tips if you want to better remember your dreams.

- Give yourself 20 minutes for meditation or relaxation, in the dark, just before falling asleep.
- When you wake up allow yourself to drift in and out a little bit. Try to remember what you were dreaming.
- Keep a dream diary. Write down everything you can remember from the dream. With practice, you'll start to remember them more fully, and vividly.
- Some people repeat to themselves while falling asleep, 'I want to remember my dreams' and report that over time this works.
- An unusual trick is to drink a lot of water just before bed. This will prompt you to pop to the toilet several times throughout the night. Your body will tend to wake you up just after a REM cycle when you are most likely to remember your dreams. Though perhaps best to approach this one with caution!

SLEEP ISSUES



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INSOMNIA

This is the most common type of sleep disorder. For some people, the primary problem is falling asleep (sleep onset) while others have issues with staying asleep (sleep maintenance). How a person is affected by insomnia can vary significantly based on its cause, severity, and how it is influenced by underlying health conditions.

Three types of insomnia

- Transient insomnia (less than one week)
- Acute insomnia (short term)
- Chronic insomnia (long term).

Common causes of insomnia include stress, an irregular schedule, poor sleeping habits, mental health disorders like anxiety and depression, illnesses, medications, neurological problems, and specific sleep disorders.

We may all have some brief or short-term insomnia (transient or acute insomnia) from time to time, and even this can have a significant impact on our life. Regularly being unable to fall asleep or remain asleep for a long enough period of time can have a significant negative impact on your mood, energy, concentration, relationships, ability to stay awake throughout the day, and ability to complete even simple daily tasks. Thankfully there are many things you can do to help, detailed later in this guide.

SLEEP WALKING

Sleepwalking happens during deep sleep meaning people can rarely remember doing it. As well as getting out of bed and walking, some people do activities or tasks in their sleep, such as getting dressed or cleaning. Some people engage in unusual behaviour, such as urinating in a closet.

In extreme cases some people will leave the house and even drive a car. Generally, it is not dangerous unless you start doing risky activities in your sleep as mentioned.

Sleepwalking is far more common in children than it is in adults. It is often related to stress or lack of sleep. In adults drinking alcohol can also have an impact. Ensuring regular, good-quality sleep can really help.



NIGHT TERRORS

Night terrors are often thought to be the same or similar to nightmares, however, the big difference is that night terrors occurs during deep sleep, meaning that you rarely remember them. The dreamer of a nightmare wakes up from the dream and may remember details, but a person who has a night terror episode remains asleep. Often it is an extreme and frightening experience, night terrors make your heart beat rapidly and might cause you to sweat excessively and/or scream out loud. The sufferer may not remember it at all the next day or may only recall something having taken place.

However, if you sleep and/or live with a sufferer it will be likely you are very aware and it can be a very scary experience. Night terrors often begin in childhood, but rarely continue into adulthood. Little is known about how to treat people who experience regular night terrors, although, in some cases, it can be linked to a traumatic experience. Again, good sleep hygiene can make a difference.

SNORING

Snoring is a very common problem, affecting 41.5% of adults in the UK. It is a breathing, rather than a sleep problem, and happens when a blockage in the airway causes the organs that help us breathe to vibrate. Typically, it is usually more of a problem for anyone who shares a room with a snorer, rather than for the person snoring (which I can testify to).

Nasal strips help by widening the nasal passage and improving the airflow when breathing. It is also better to sleep on your side, as sleeping on your back can cause your tongue to fall backward and partially block your airflow. Also drinking less alcohol, exercising more regularly, and losing weight (if you are overweight) can also reduce snoring as well as all the other obvious benefits of doing those things.



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SLEEP APNOEA

Sleep apnoea causes shallow breathing or pauses in breathing. These can last up to 30 seconds at a time. In most cases, breathing returns to normal again, often with a loud snort or choking sound to clear the airway. Those with sleep apnoea can wake up frequently throughout the night, sweating, with a dry mouth and a headache.

It is important to treat sleep apnoea in order to prevent the brain from being deprived of oxygen during sleep. A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device can help by easing the airflow and your GP can provide more details.

We are the only
mammals that can
delay sleep

SLEEP PARALYSIS

Sleep paralysis is a feeling of being conscious but unable to move. It occurs when a person passes between stages of awake and sleep. During these transitions, you may be unable to move or speak for a few seconds, even up to a few minutes.

Some people may also feel pressure or a sense of choking. It is a very scary experience.

Did you know Spiderman actor Tom Holland developed sleep paralysis as he became more famous?

OTHER SLEEP ISSUES

There are many other types of sleeping disorders that can result in various types of sleep problems. The most include:

- narcolepsy
- restless leg syndrome (RLS)
- parasomnias



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SLEEP STATISTICS

40%

of people aged between 18 and 24 say that they struggle to fall asleep quickly.

33%

of people in the UK above 55 years old say that they struggle to fall asleep fast.

51%

of people aged between 18 and 29 reported getting at least 8 hours of sleep.

36%

of the adults in the UK struggle to fall asleep at least once a week.

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35%

of individuals in the UK said lack of proper sleep made them anxious.

4 in 10

adults said that poor sleep has made them feel more stressed.

43%

of UK citizens stated that poor sleep made them irritable or angry.

1 in 3

people in the UK is sleeping less than before the pandemic.



WHAT CAN IMPACT YOUR SLEEP

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MENTAL HEALTH

We all worry from time to time and have ups and downs. These things will impact our sleep but usually just in the short term. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues however can have a significant impact on our sleep. Often this leads to a lack of sleep but may also lead to too much. Lack of sleep (or too much) also has an impact on our mental health. So it can cause a vicious cycle that can be hard to break free from.

The tips in this guide can help us sleep better and help generally with mental health wellbeing.

As always, always check in with your GP or other medical professional if you feel you can't cope or you need additional support.



PHYSICAL HEALTH

Exercising on a regular basis is thought to help us sleep, as, among other things, it can help to reduce anxiety and relieve stress. Exercising earlier in the day is better, as exercise increases the body's adrenaline production, making it more difficult to sleep if done just before bedtime. It doesn't mean needing to hit the gym every day, simply increasing your physical activity can make a big difference.

ILLNESS & PAIN

Though being poorly can sometimes prevent us from getting a good sleep it is important to rest properly. Good sleep helps boost our immune system and feel better faster. Pain will impair also our sleep, headaches, toothaches, earaches, etc! Some of these can be dealt with quickly and easily.

Other things may require you to visit your GP. Chronic or persistent pain that carries on for longer than 12 weeks despite medication or treatment, can be difficult to manage but implementing some of the tips detailed can help.

ANTICIPATION

It is common to lie awake before an important event, thinking it over and over. However, this then makes it harder for us to get to sleep which will mean we are not performing at our best the following day.

Similarly, you may be excited about what you are doing the next day, but a lack of sleep will impede your enjoyment. If you know you have to be up earlier than normal to catch a train or take a flight, chances are getting to sleep may be more difficult than normal.

Koalas are the animal that
sleep the longest – between 2
–22 hours a day!

ENVIRONMENT

Most of us have a regular place we sleep, our bed in our bedroom. So, this should be somewhere that we associate with sleep. For some people that means they struggle to sleep if somewhere unfamiliar such as staying with friends or in a hotel. Some people however struggle in their own bedroom. Although everyone is different and has their own personal preferences, the common factors that can affect our sleep are light, noise, and temperature. Too much light or noise can prevent you from falling asleep or staying asleep. You might want to use an eye mask or earplugs if you have an annoying streetlight or noisy neighbours. The room temperature is also very important. Perhaps invest in a heater or thicker duvet if too cold or use a thinner cover or open a window if too hot.

DIET

Did you know eating rice, oats, and dairy products can produce chemicals that increase our desire to sleep? However, food and drink that contain lots of caffeine or sugar can keep you awake, so drinking less tea and coffee and eating less chocolate and other sugary foods late in the day might help you to sleep better.

ALCOHOL

Although it can make you feel tired and can help you get to sleep, alcohol often impairs the quality of your sleep and makes you more likely to wake up during the night. As the effects of alcohol wear off, and you may need to go to the toilet frequently or get up to drink water if you are dehydrated preventing you getting a proper sleep. An occasional over indulgence is fine, but regularly drinking too much alcohol will cause sleep problems alongside other associated health problems.

SMOKING

Smoking is associated with increased insomnia severity and shorter sleep duration, particularly nightly smoking. This is one of the many, many reasons for stopping smoking. It is probably the single best thing you can do for your health.

Basically, if you smoke - stop! If you need support stopping there are many things you can do - and lots of support available!

If you need help giving up smoking, cutting down on drinking, or with any other habit that may be stopping you from sleeping better - get in touch to find out how hypnotherapy can help

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MY EXPERIENCE



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I suffered from regular night terrors, sleep walking and sleep paralysis as a teenager and into early adulthood. I do still occasionally (but far less often) experience some of these issues.

There were occasions when I was found at the top of the stairs, and regularly woke up my parents, housemates, and partners with horrible screams. Often I had no recollection of these incidents and was informed the next day.

Sometimes I could recall something having taken place. One thing I can still vividly remember though is the experience of feeling awake but completely unable to move – one of the most frightening experiences I have ever had, and I used to have it regularly!

Thankfully all of these are far less frequent than they used to be – and researching good sleep practises and getting into good sleep habits have made a real difference.

”



TOP 10 TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

1 - CREATE A ROUTINE

Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day – including weekends if possible. If you find you are not tired when you go to bed, try and get up 30 mins before your usual get up time for a few days to make sure that you are actually tired at bedtime.

2 - GET HEALTHY

Healthy eating and regular exercise are great ways of helping yourself sleep better and improve your health and wellbeing generally. Exercise helps to reduce stress and moving your body will make you physically tired. Exercise can increase your need for deep sleep. However, avoid exercising too late in the day as it can prevent you from getting to sleep.



3 - CUT DOWN AND CUT OUT

There are certain things that cutting back on (or cutting out entirely) will benefit your sleep. Though it is best to focus on what you are gaining (a good night sleep, feeling refreshed, better health, saving money), than what you are stopping! Cut back or cut out caffeine, sugar, alcohol, smoking! If you need help cutting down or giving up any of these – hypnotherapy can help.

4 - AVOID LARGE MEALS AT NIGHT

Eat lightly and healthily in the early evening. Heavy meals make it more difficult for your body to shut down during digestion. So a lighter evening meal will help you feel more comfortable at bedtime.

5 - MAKE RELAXATION A PRIORITY

Dedicate some time in the evening to proper relaxation. Have a warm bath, read a book, listen to a guided relaxation session. Anything that helps you switch off and properly relax.

6 - KEEP ELECTRONIC DEVICES OUT OF THE BEDROOM

Studies have found electronic devices such as mobiles, tablets affect sleep. Try to keep them out of the bedroom and stop using them an hour before bed. Generally, these provide a sleep distraction, and those with a backlit 'blue light' display may suppress melatonin production – the hormone that helps you sleep. Ideally you should stop using any devices two hours before you go to sleep to reduce their impact.



7 - NO NAPPING

If you have trouble sleeping, you may feel tempted to catch up on sleep by taking naps. However, unless you're feeling dangerously sleepy (while driving or operating machinery, for instance), this usually makes it more difficult to sleep at night. If you do feel tired during the day, get up and take a walk around, get some fresh air, or do something challenging for a short while, like a crossword or a Sudoku.

8 - IF YOU'RE NOT TIRED, GET UP

If you're finding it difficult to get to sleep, don't just lie there worrying. Ideally, falling asleep at night should take you 10-15 minutes. If it is taking much longer than this, get up for a few minutes and get a drink (no sugar or caffeine, remember!), and go back to bed when you're feeling a bit sleepier. Some people suggest doing a mundane task such as ironing for 15 minutes or so.

9 - WRITE A TO-DO LIST

Sleep can be difficult if you are busy thinking about all the things you need to do the next day. Our brains are programmed to think ahead, to plan and to problem solve. Writing all this down gets it out your head and onto a bit of paper, ready to be dealt with the next day when you are far more refreshed and focussed.

10 - DON'T STRESS IT!

Often when you don't sleep properly you worry about it, which causes us to not sleep properly. Thinking about sleep too much or trying to force yourself to sleep will only keep you awake. Learning how to relax both your body and mind instead will help you to get to sleep much more easily.

The longest someone has gone
without sleep is 11 days, 25 minutes

RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

Perhaps do a body relaxation scan, focussing on different parts of your body. Start at the top of your head and work your way down. Your eyes, jaw, neck, shoulders arms, chest, stomach, hands, legs, feet, toes etc.

Really pay attention to how each area feels. Does that area feel tense, heavy, warm, etc. And just breath away any stress or tension and breathing in a sense of calm and deep relaxation. Take your time and enjoy the experience.





HYPNOTHERAPY CAN HELP

Hypnotherapy for sleep can be helpful if you are unsure why you are having issues sleeping or need to deal with anxiety, stress, or other issues impacting your sleep. Often what may be preventing us sleeping is at an unconscious level. We want to sleep better but something may be preventing that from happening. All hypnotherapists use different styles and techniques but will involve working with your unconscious to help you achieve your goal of better sleep.

An important part of hypnotherapy for sleep is providing tools and techniques for how to relax. Your hypnotherapist will often teach you self-hypnosis techniques and provide recordings to use in your own time that can really help for sleep issues.

The number of hypnotherapy sessions you'll need will vary from person to person. Some people only need one session, while others may require further work. Get in touch for a chat to find out how hypnotherapy could help you.

"I went into this feeling skeptical and wary, and came out trusting him and convinced of the effectiveness of the treatment."

"The shift has felt massive and so, so positive. I can't say thank you enough for all your help. It has really changed my life."

Malcolm Struthers Hypnotherapy

www.malcolmstruthers.com

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[Book a free consultation](#)

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Keeping track of how you sleep can help identify patterns and pinpoint specific issues to deal with. Completing this questionnaire over a number of days or weeks will help give you a better understanding of your own sleep.

You may not have exact answers to these questions, but just the best guess is fine.

Give your sleep a rating out of 10 (10 being a perfect sleep and 1 being a really terrible sleep)	
What time did you go to bed?	
How did you sleep?	
How long approximately did it take you to get to sleep?	
How many times do you remember waking during the night?	
What time did you wake up?	
How long did you sleep for in total?	
What food or drink did you have within four hours of bedtime, and how long before bed did you consume it?	
What was the temperature in your bedroom?	
What light sources were there when you went to sleep?	
How much noise was there when you went to sleep?	
What did you do in the two hours before going to bed??	
Any other comments?	
How did you feel the next day?	

"Best night's sleep I've had in
ages and I've been calm, focused,
and confident since. All in one
session"



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Get in touch for a chat to find out how
hypnotherapy could help you.

Book a [free consultation](#) to find out more.

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