

HOW TO
STOP WORRYING

&

START
SLEEPING



— YOUR 7 DAY —
SLEEP SOLUTION

LANA HALL

LANAHALLPSYCHOLOGY

How To Stop Worrying & Start Sleeping

Your 7 Day Sleep Solution

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About the Author

Lana Hall is a registered Psychologist in Australia and runs her own practice in Brisbane, Queensland. Lana gets a lot of joy from helping people to improve their lives. She does this by translating evidence from psychology research into actions that anyone can implement. She also loves to write. Lana has combined both these passions in this, her first book. When not working with clients or on her next book, Lana also writes a blog based on how to improve your life satisfaction using the power of psychology.

Disclaimer: This guide is for information purposes only. Any advice given is based on Lana's understanding of psychological techniques to improve sleep. Results may vary between individuals and no guarantee of sleep improvement can be offered

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Introduction

Why does lack of sleep cause us so much concern? We worry because sleep is so important to our ability to function in many areas of our lives. As anyone who has ever struggled to doze off can attest, lack of sleep leads to irritability, making mistakes, and a lack of concentration. We can't remember what we're meant to be doing, and if we can, we stuff it up. Long term, it can drain our enthusiasm for the parts of life we enjoy, and cause us to give up more easily on things we find challenging. The chronic stress state it places on us can lead to lethargy, lack of appetite, a low functioning immune system (hello, sickness) and an unhealthy addiction to caffeinated beverages. Chronic sleep deprivation shares a lot of similarities with an episode of depression. Add to these effects worrying about the fact we're not sleeping – worrying so hard we keep ourselves awake and make the problem worse! - and it's easy to see why a lack of sleep is cause for concern.

This book was written as a guide to help improve your sleep, quickly. It was written for people who need tips and techniques that have been shown to be helpful. It does not go into great detail about *why* these tips and techniques work. Instead, I've focussed on sensible suggestions for getting to sleep and maintaining good sleeping habits. It is a practical book.

That said, after I finished writing, it occurred to me that some people might be left asking 'why?' Why is she suggesting certain things? So what follows is a brief summary of why the suggestions have been made. If you'd like more information on how sleep works, many other books cover this topic. If you're itching to get to the practical content, please go right ahead and skip to Day 1.

This is the basic premise upon which the rest of the book is based:

Humans sleep in cycles. For an adult, these cycles last around ninety minutes. During these cycles we move through deep sleep and light sleep. We move around, change position, dream, don't dream. Many people can move between light and deep sleep easily and without noticing. They are not aware of their movements, or the changes in types of sleep.

For some people, however, during their periods of light sleep they are prone to waking. The most common reason for this is anxiety of some kind. It may be an unconscious anxiety, where our body wakes us because our senses become unduly aroused— we get too hot, we hear a loud noise. It may be a tension based anxiety, where we quickly move from light sleep to fully awake because we have an excess of energy (nervous energy or physical energy). Or it may be mental anxiety – as soon as we are partly awake, our minds begin to worry and plan.

This book attempts to address all the potential causes of anxiety that lead us to wake during periods of light sleep, and which also make it difficult to fall back asleep. Sleep, the ultimate relaxation, is the opposite of anxiety. It makes sense that in order to fall asleep easily and

quickly, we need to be as relaxed as possible. Physically, emotionally, and mentally relaxed. The rest of this book is about how to bring about that relaxation.

DAY 1

THE PHYSICAL SIDE OF GOOD SLEEP: GIVING YOUR BODY SOME HELP

Our journey starts with a focus on the physical components of good sleep – both the environment and how we treat our bodies. This is because no matter how relaxed you are, no matter how good you are at sleeping usually, if the physical conditions are wrong, you'll have trouble getting to sleep. To check if physical issues could be affecting your sleep, we're going to do a Mini Sleep Audit.

Mini Sleep Audit Part I: Environmental Considerations

Start in your bedroom. Have a look around your bedroom, and ask yourself the following: How dark is this room? Could it be darker? Aim to get rid of as much light from outside as possible – street lights and moon light are capable of sending wake up signals to your body. If you can afford to, get block out curtains. If you can't, flatten some cardboard boxes. Cut them to the size of your window and place them behind your blinds or curtains to block out more light (masking tape, or cutting exactly to size, will help them to stay up). Another option is to use a sleep mask to block out light – but many people find the pressure of these on their face keeps them awake.

Next, remove any TVs, computers, mobile phones or tablets out of the room. If they're in sight, the temptation is there to use them. Exposure to these artificial light sources sends a signal to your body to stay awake. If you use your phone as an alarm clock, you'll need to source a watch or an old fashioned clock radio for time keeping and banish your phone to another room. Ensure any lights are only as bright as they need to be. Could you switch to lower wattage bulbs?

Is your room smelly? You don't want any of your senses to be unduly awakened during the night. Check you don't have any strongly scented candles or perfumes in the room. Clean up any mould or dust. Even the smell of washing powder on your sheets can keep you up, if it's a strong enough odour.

What about noise? A noisy room is harder to manage because usually when a bedroom is noisy someone else is to blame – a flatmate who watches TV at high volume, a partner who snores, or a strange bird that calls loudly at odd times during the night. Do what you can to minimise noise. It is worth considering sleeping with earplugs.

Our sense of touch can even affect our sleep. Do you have blankets or sheets that are scratchy or dirty? Clean them regularly and consider replacing or removing items that aren't

comfortable. If you can't afford to change your bedding, you may be better off wearing two comfy jumpers than being huddled under a scratchy blanket that irritates you.

Are you able to regulate your temperature throughout the night? If you don't have a way of maintaining a consistent temperature in the room, you need to compensate for this. Generally, we go to bed when it's hottest, and overnight it slowly cools down. Being too cold or too hot will interfere with your sleep, so have an extra blanket or jumper to hand and trial putting on or taking off extra layers when you wake.

You've probably heard it before, but it's worth saying again: if you have trouble sleeping, then the bed is for sex and sleeping, and NOTHING ELSE. Clear your room of anything that tempts you to use your bed for other purposes, including reading, studying and researching, playing computer games, watching TV or movies and eating.

Mini Sleep Audit Part II: Physical Considerations

Now you've made your environment as conducive to sleep as you can, it's time to focus on the physical body. Ideally, we want to be really tired before we go to bed. To make sure you are sufficiently tired check out how your day measures up against the sleep-inducing and sleep-inhibiting activities below.

Sleep-inducing activities

Exercise is really good for making us tired and helping us to sleep better. You need to be doing exercise during the day (but not within a couple of hours of bedtime) so you are physically tired. Exercise needs to be a separate activity in your day, even if you have a physically demanding job, or a busy schedule. Exercise every day if you can – you need to be tired every day for sleeping every day. Although it's often the last thing we feel like doing when we're not sleeping well, exercise is a powerful sleep regulator and needs to be prioritised if you are having trouble sleeping.

Maximise your exposure to natural light during the day. This might include choosing to exercise outside rather than at the gym, taking your lunch break outside rather than in the office, and using natural light to illuminate your home whenever possible. Weather can influence our decisions on how much time we spend outside, but from a sleep point of view – the more natural light the better. Aim for at least thirty minutes a day.

Sleep-inhibiting activities

Take a look at your caffeine intake overall and particularly in the second half of the day. Everyone has different limits, and we 'get used' to caffeine, so there's no real rules about amounts here. As a general guide: You know that awesome pumped/ wired/ energetic feeling that you get from caffeinated foods and drinks? You don't want to be feeling that before bed. If in doubt, cut back. If you need rules, then no caffeine after lunchtime and only two coffees, or

four teas, or one energy drink a day. Caffeine is commonly found in coffee, tea energy drinks, cola drinks, and chocolate.

Avoid alcohol in the evening. Many people who have trouble falling asleep find that a drink or two relaxes them and helps them go to sleep. While this is true, drinking alcohol reduces the quality of sleep you get and makes it more likely that you will wake up after a few hours (when the sedating effects wear off), and then struggle to return to sleep. A good sleep routine (see next section) can provide the same benefits of a drink or two, without the side effects of alcohol.

If you are a smoker, avoid smoking in the hour before you go to bed. Nicotine is a stimulant and while smoking can feel relaxing, the effects of the nicotine remain in your system and keep you alert.

Don't go to bed really full. One of sleep's primary functions is repairing the damage done to your body during the day. If your body is busy digesting, it completes this first, before switching to its repair jobs. This interferes with how rested you feel after sleeping. Being hungry isn't good either, as the sensation of hunger may distract you. Find a balance that works for you.

Avoid or postpone getting too emotional before bed. It's normal to blow things out of proportion at night, especially when we're tired. It's normal to get hooked into thoughts that will seem silly in hindsight. So—don't argue or start complex, heated discussions in the evenings. Ask to discuss any emotive issues with your family or flatmates in the morning instead.

Getting emotional doesn't just come from our interactions with other, physical people. Media consumption can also invoke strong emotions, such as feeling depressed after looking at Facebook, being outraged by a clip on YouTube, getting excited by an email invitation, or feeling frustration at a work request that comes through after hours. Limit media consumption in the evenings so that you're not worked up when you go to bed. Aim to stop using media which may upset you around two hours before bedtime. Instead, choose light entertainment like comedy shows or begin a relaxing hobby like learning to play an instrument, taking up a craft or try drawing or colouring in.

NO DAY NAPS. Do not take naps. Napping interferes with night-time sleep and once you start sleeping well, you won't need them. In the meantime, you want to be as tired as possible when you go to bed and napping will make you less tired.

Mini Sleep Audit Part III: Sleep Routine

Are you thinking: what's a sleep routine? Most people would not have a conscious sleep routine, but it's one of the easiest ways to regulate your sleeping. It just means you have a

predictable order to the events of your evening and sleeping, so your body knows what to expect.

Much like if you eat lunch at the same time every day your body gets used to it and gets hungry in anticipation; if you go to bed at the same time each evening and get up at the same time each morning your body will start to get tired in response to the routine. Choose a bedtime that's about right for you, and then stick to it. Like your sleep depended on it. Because your sleep does depend on it. Each person needs different amounts of sleep, so getting your total hours right is trial and error. Exactly when you go to bed will depend on your lifestyle too. If in doubt, aim for eight hours in bed and see how you go. Once you're sleeping well, you'll work out if this is too much or too little.

Winding down

Once you have decided when you'll go to bed and when you'll wake up, you need a 'wind down before bed' routine. The routine starts with no screen time for an hour before bedtime. That means no TV, no computer, no phone, no tablet, no video games. Turning off these devices marks the start of your sleep routine.

So what do you do for the next hour? Quiet, non-stimulating activities. Reading is the most popular choice (remembering not to choose something that arouses your emotions too much). You could have a shower. You could meditate or practise a relaxation strategy (more on this later). You could knit, do a crossword or other puzzle, listen to quiet and relaxing music, or take up a hobby like sewing or scrapbooking. The last part of your routine will likely be brushing your teeth, getting changed into pyjamas and going to the toilet. Make sure that whatever you do, the amount of artificial light is at minimum. Turn off unnecessary lamps or lights in other rooms. This lowered light sends a signal to your body that it's time to sleep.

Your exact routine is up to you but you need to do roughly the same things, at the same time, in the same order, each night. This sends the strongest signal to your body and your mind to slow down, that sleep time is coming up.

A note for shift workers

If you are trying to fall asleep during the day, or at different times of day or night depending on your shifts, it's even more important to focus on physical cues to help your body know when to go to sleep. Modify your environment to mimic night as best you can using the tips above, and have a very defined sleep routine that you start an hour before you go to bed – even if you come home feeling exhausted. Your body really needs this kind of signal that it'll be sleep time soon because the cues our bodies normally use, such as a lack of daylight, are absent.

Putting it all together

If you follow all the tips above, the following is an idea of how your daily routine might look. You might rise at around 6am, and head out for a run shortly after. Then it's business as usual until lunchtime, when you might start having your lunch outside to increase the amount of natural light you encounter during the day. By 2pm, you've switched from coffee to herbal tea, and you resist a little nap on the couch when you come home – even though by now you're feeling exhausted. You start cooking instead and end up having dinner earlier, which helps because you won't be too full when you do head off to bed. You might check your emails and social media, but when it rolls around to 8pm you switch to a funny TV show instead. At 9pm you do some reading on the couch. By 9.30pm you're practising your new relaxation exercise before starting a bedtime routine of personal care. You set your alarm, close your blackout curtains, put your phone in the kitchen, and make sure there's an extra jumper by the bed. By 10pm, you're in bed and ready for eight hours sleep. Even if you don't drift off immediately, you're not worried because you've got lots of techniques to help you cope and encourage sleep (don't worry, those are in the rest of this book).

Remember, this is just an idea. Details such as how much sleep you'd like, when you quit caffeine and when and how you exercise will depend on your personal circumstances. The important point is to be open to analysing your current routine and making changes to it in line with the strategies suggested.

If you follow all the tips above, you'll be giving yourself the best physical chance of getting a good night's sleep. So now that's sorted, let's tackle the tougher stuff – the emotional and mental arousal that interferes with a good night's sleep.

Checklist – Physical Considerations

Have I made my physical environment as calming as possible?

Have I eliminated/ minimised any sensory distractions?

Have I made time for exercise?

Have I minimised caffeine?

Have I given up day napping?

Have I set a sleep routine?

Things I still need to do:

OVERVIEW: DAYS 2, 3 & 4

THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF GOOD SLEEP: LEARNING AND PRACTISING RELAXATION

Okay, so you've followed all the steps on Day 1 and you still spent all night tossing and turning. Your room was dark and quiet, you avoided caffeine, you exercised, you didn't nap. You completed your sleep routine and fell into bed at your chosen time, feeling exhausted. But when your head hits that pillow, you just can't sleep. It could be your emotions interfering.

Stress, fear, anger and sadness can all keep us up at night. So can excitement and anticipation. Any extreme emotional state will interfere with sleep, and so the next few days are about trying out different ways to invoke emotional relaxation – bringing about a sense of calm that will allow sleep to descend.

These strategies are all self-paced and designed to be used in bed. You can try using them during your wind-down hour before bed or once you lie down to go to sleep. You can use them at any time during the night. They are relatively simple so they can be easily memorised. This means you can use them without any equipment and without needing to switch on a light to read through them; however, while you are becoming familiar with their general ideas, you may have to practise during the day. Familiarise yourself with the exercise by reading through it a few times before you use it in bed. You will want to be comfortable enough with the phrases to take yourself through the exercise in bed, in the middle of the night, without needing to look at this guide or listen to a recording.

Each day presents two different strategies. Day 2 focuses on mental ways to bring about emotional relaxation. Day 3 is about physical ways to invoke a sense of calm. Day 4 uses emotion-focussed techniques. But don't get caught up in the labels. Just give each one a try, and see which work best for you. Once you've given them all a try, you might decide to combine elements of two or more of them into your own personal relaxation routine. They are all designed to relax; mixing and matching won't hurt. What will hurt is worrying about if you're doing them right! So if you forget a part, or aren't sure what to do next, don't worry about it. Just go back to focussing on your breathing, as in the first exercise for Day 2.

DAY 2

A MENTAL APPROACH TO RELAXATION STRATEGIES

These strategies focus on the role of your mind in relaxation. I've started with these strategies because they are the simplest to learn and practice. The exercises work by distracting you from your mind's mental chatter as the path to relaxation.

The Simplest Calming Technique

Take a breath in for 4 seconds. Focus your mind on the counting of the 'in' breath. Say 1, 2, 3, 4 as you breathe in.

Then breathe out for 4 seconds. Again, focus your mind on the counting of the 'out' breath. Say 1, 2, 3, 4 as you breathe out.

That's it! Seems too simple doesn't it? But our breathing is deeply connected to our mental, emotional and physiological states. When we become agitated, feel anxious, get mad, and even during exercise, our breathing changes. When we consciously slow our breathing, we can reduce our agitation and anxiety.

The counting is also important – it's the mental side of this exercise. Focussing on the numbers helps to distract you from thoughts and worries, and instead focus on here and now. Getting caught up in their thoughts is the most common reason people cannot fall asleep, or cannot get back to sleep after they wake up.

Continue the exercise for as long as needed – hopefully until you fall asleep.

Variations

Once you've mastered the basic technique, you can try other variations. The advantage of variations is you can make the process a bit more complex for your mind, meaning you'll be less likely to be distracted by worries and thoughts.

Firstly, you may find you are able to slow your breathing down further, especially if you start to breathe using your diaphragm. This means that when you breathe in, your stomach moves out, rather than your lungs. It can take some practice to master this, but that's a good distraction for your mind. Just increase your counting to fit however many seconds you are breathing in and out for.

There are many variations on this exercise that you can try to ensure it keeps your mind distracted.

You can try using a word instead of counting if you find it more helpful. So you might say – slow down, slow down or re-lax, re-lax, or c-a-l-m for each in breath/out breath.

You can use multiples of 1, 2, 3, 4 instead – e.g. 3, 6, 9, 12. Or A, B, C, D.

You can try the good old-fashioned sheep jumping over a fence technique. See one sheep jump over the fence for each second you breathe in or out. You might also imagine water dripping, or cars driving past, or birds flying past, or a pendulum swinging backwards and forwards.

You could tune into your heart beat as you breathe.

Try remembering a place you have visited that you found especially calming – such as a forest or the ocean. See yourself fully immersed in this scene, remembering the way things looked, smells, sounds, and most importantly, the feeling that being in this place invoked.

If you are a spiritual or religious person, then you can focus on the sense of connection you get when you think of important figures or themes in your faith. For example, you might focus on yourself being connected to all other living things, and the feelings of calm and inclusion that come from feeling one with your surrounds. Or focus on a religious figure of importance to you and the feeling which comes when you imagine that you are cared for by a higher power.

Choosing to reflect on a small achievement or positive interaction you had that day can work in the same way as visualising a calming place. Remember as many small details as you can about the event, and focus on the positive feelings you had.

Any image, word or thought that you find calming and reassuring can work. What you're looking for is a point of focus which is mentally taxing enough that it engages your mind, stopping it from thinking of more emotional topics, but not so taxing that focussing on it keeps you awake.

DAY 3

A PHYSICAL APPROACH TO RELAXATION STRATEGIES

Don't worry, it's not more exercise! Today we're going to try using our physical body and its sensations to invoke relaxation. These two exercises are still done in bed.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves purposefully tensing and then relaxing muscles as a way of inducing relaxation. The process invokes chemical reactions in our bodies that cause us to feel relaxed. It's great for people who like to do something a bit 'active' while they're relaxing. It is also the technique taught to Australia's Olympic athletes to help them get to sleep before a big competition (yes, even the world's top performers need help relaxing sometimes).

Disclaimer: If you have any physical ailments or injuries that you think might be negatively affected by this technique, please see your chosen health professional for advice about whether it's suitable for you.

Begin the exercise by starting to slow down your breathing. Just like in the previous exercise, take four seconds to breathe in, then four to breathe out (or work with whatever feels 'slow' to you). Breathe like this for around 30 seconds or until you start to feel calmer and more relaxed.

Then clench your left foot. Curl your toes towards the sole of your foot. Hold it tight, as tight as you can, for 5 seconds. Focus on how your foot feels while tensed.

Relax your foot. Allow it to fully relax, and focus on this sensation. How is it different from the tense feeling? Focus on the fully relaxed feeling for around 10 seconds. It may help to repeat 'relax' to yourself as you do this.

Continue this sequence of 5 seconds of tension, 10 seconds of relaxation, as you work through your body parts as below.

Left foot

Right foot

Left calf

Right calf

Left thigh

Right thigh

Buttocks and hips

Stomach (suck it in!)

Left arm (make a fist and clench your forearm)

Right arm

Back (try and bring your shoulder blades together)

Shoulders (bring them up high towards your ears)

Neck (tilt your head back)

Jaw (open your mouth as wide as it can go)

Face (scrunch it up)

Whole body (do it all at once)

Continue your slow breathing throughout the exercise and take a few minutes to focus back on slow breathing at the end of the exercise. Repeat any parts that you still feel are tense, whilst being careful not to strain yourself.

While this might sound too 'active' to help you fall asleep, you'll find that your mind wanders off task a fair bit, and soon you forget to tense the next body part, and then before you know it, you're asleep.

Band of light

This exercise focuses on your physical body, but does not involve any physical exertion. It's safe to use with any existing physical limitations.

Begin this exercise by slowing your breathing down, focusing on just your in-breath and out-breath. When you are ready, envision a band of light at the top of your head. The light can be whatever colour you find most relaxing. As you work through this exercise, the band of light moves down your body. You will become aware of the different physical sensations in your body.

As you continue to breathe, imagine the band of light encircling the top of your head. Notice any physical sensations you feel on that part of your body. Whatever sensations are there are okay. See the light flowing into these sensations. The light helps you to relax. The band of light helps you to let go of any tension in the top of your head and to accept any other sensations that you can't change. The light is soothing.

When you are ready, see the light moving down your head. Across your eyes, your ears, your mouth, your jaw. As it moves, notice whatever sensations and tensions are there. Allow the

light to fill these sensations, relaxing you, soothing these areas. Notice the back of your head, your mouth and your tongue. All become filled with the light. All become soothed and relaxed.

Continue to watch the band of light as it slowly moves down your body, down through your neck. Notice the sensations. See the light filling your neck and relaxing you.

See the band of light widen now, to accommodate your shoulders. The band of light continues to move slowly down your body. What sensations are there in your shoulders, across your upper back, across your chest? See the light fill each of these areas. Identify the sensations there. Then let the light soothe and relax these areas.

Move the light to your arms now. Watch it flow down your arms to your hands and your fingertips. Notice how your arms feel and any tension there. Let the light soothe and relax your arms and hands.

The light keeps moving. Focus now on your lower back and stomach. These are areas where we often experience pain or tension. Spend some time breathing really deeply here, breathing into those areas, filling them with the light. Have the light surround your sensations, soothing and relaxing you.

Move the light now to your hips and your buttocks. Identify any sensations, and let the light fill and relax these areas. Then watch as the light continues down your thighs, knees, calves and feet. Notice any tension. Feel the light embracing the tension, soothing it, relaxing it.

Once the light has reached your toes, scan your body for any areas or sensations you want the light to re-visit. Continue to revisit areas as you feel appropriate, until you feel complete.

Then see the light leaving your body, through your feet, and as it goes, taking your tension with it.

Focus now on your relaxed body, and your relaxed breathing.

DAY 4

AN EMOTIONAL APPROACH TO RELAXATION STRATEGIES

Even though practising relaxation is about invoking a peaceful emotional state, I've left the emotion-focussed relaxation strategies until last. This is because these two techniques, particularly the second one, are the most complex of the relaxation techniques presented in this guide. If you find these too difficult, then just use another relaxation strategy. The aim is for you to be calm, not stressed! But please do give them a try. They can be very effective.

Peaceful in-breath

Begin this exercise by slowing your breathing down. Really focus all your attention on your breath. Breathing in, breathing out. Then when you are ready, start to imagine your in-breath as a cloud of peace or relaxation. There is no right or wrong way to do this, just start to feel that by breathing in, you are breathing in a state of calm. You might like to imagine breathing in a cloud, or a particular colour, or even inhaling the word 'peace' or 'relax'. You might imagine yourself breathing the air from the ocean or from a forest. Use whatever image works for you so that you feel like you are literally breathing in a sensation of calm.

Feel yourself becoming calmer as this air enters your lungs and then leaves your body. Continue breathing this way for a little while, filling you up with calm.

When you have become used to this idea, you may notice your mind or your feelings are starting to draw your attention. Use your breath to calm them. For example, if your mind has started to think about an event tomorrow and you are worrying, see your next in-breath as travelling up to your mind, surrounding those worries, and then taking the worries with it as it leaves your body on the out-breath. Whatever is most dominant for you, whether that's a thought, or a feeling, or an image, or a place of tension in your body, direct your breath there. Continue to breathe into that thought/ feeling/ image/ tension until you feel it change, or until another thought/ feeling/ image/ place starts to draw your attention more. Then simply move your calming breath to that. Just keep going. No matter how long it takes, no matter how many new things come up that need that calming in-breath, keep breathing calm into them, and envisioning your out-breath as releasing whatever it is that is keeping you from sleep. Just keep going.

Embrace your emotions

Often we find ourselves fighting whatever it is that keeps us awake at night. We just want that itchy feeling/ nagging worry/ butterflies in our stomach to go away. If only it would go, everything would be alright. But fighting something does not make us relaxed. It does not bring us peace. And it doesn't help us sleep. It's like trying to hit a ball away while standing in front of

a brick wall. The harder you hit, the harder the ball comes back to you. The solution? Drop the racket and the ball will sail right past you.

So how do you do that?

The first thing to do is to stop struggling and start observing. Pay attention to your body and pick the most dominant, unpleasant feeling or thought. Now, instead of trying to ignore it, pay attention to it. Pretend you're a scientist looking at your own body and able to see this feeling as though it was an object. Then ask yourself: What shape is this uncomfortable thought or feeling? Where exactly is it located in your body? Does it have definite edges or does it slowly fade out? If it had a colour, what colour would it be? How heavy/ light/soft/ hard do you imagine it to be? Does it move or stay still? You can give it a pet name, imagine it as a type of animal or object if you like – a heavy stone, a roaring tiger, Scared Sally. The aim is to get to know this feeling. It can't physically hurt you. It can't make you think a certain way. It has limits. But you will only know this if you take a look.

Once you've had a good look, start to breathe into that feeling or thought. See your in-breath mingling with it. Create space around it, by using your breathing to open up a space around the feeling in your body, to give it edges around which your breathing flows (even if this starts off as the edges of your body).

Keep allowing the thought or feeling to be there. As your mind complains about this, about how horrible and uncomfortable the thought or feeling is, just say thank-you to your mind and continue to allow it to remain. Notice your urges to fight and change the feeling but then bring your attention back to the feeling yourself.

It can help to say the following things to yourself when practising this exercise:

'I don't like this feeling, but I have room for it.'

'It's unpleasant, but I can accept it.'

'I'm having the feeling of anger/sadness/fear right now.'

'I don't like it, I don't want it, I don't approve of it. But right here and now I accept it.'

Hopefully as you go about this exercise, your scary thought/ feelings start to seem less scary and less huge and you begin to feel sleepy. At this point, you might like to drop into one of the other meditations – calming breathing or peaceful in-breath.

SUMMARY: DAYS 2 TO 4

You now have six different ways to approach relaxation: two mental, two physical and two emotional.

The key elements in all of these exercises are:

Self-paced. Each exercise is simple enough that you don't need to listen to a script but can run through the exercise in your head.

Slow breathing. In each exercise, we breathe at a rate slower than we normally would – a rate similar to how we might breathe when we're asleep.

Distance from unpleasant thoughts and feelings. Each exercise works by either distracting you from unpleasant thoughts and feelings, or by helping you to see that thoughts and feelings can change and reduce.

Remember, feel free to mash scripts together, swap from one technique to another when you feel like it, or invent your own techniques, so long as they follow the key elements listed above.

By the end of Day 4, I'm hoping you have developed a relaxation strategy that works for you. It doesn't have to send you sleep yet. But it should leave you feeling more calm than when you started and you have to be able to do it all by yourself. The default relaxation technique is calming breathing – it's the simplest technique. If none of the others scripts are more effective for you, keep it simple and just use breathing as your relaxation technique. And keep practising. You can't overdo these ideas. They become more effective over time, as you train your body and mind to realise that when you start the technique, it's time to relax. Whenever you'd like to be asleep and find yourself awake is a fine time to practise your relaxation technique. Hopefully your mind will get so bored with this it'll give up and just go to sleep! But maybe not. If not, once you've completed the checklist below, read on...

Checklist – Emotional Considerations

Do I avoid situations that evoke strong emotions in the evenings?

Do I feel confident that my relaxation strategy:

Is able to be completed without any equipment (self-paced)?

Incorporates slowing my breathing?

Creates a sense of distance and distracts from my thoughts?

Creates a sense of distance and distracts from my emotions?

Things I still need to do:

OVERVIEW: DAYS 5, 6 & 7

THE MENTAL SIDE OF GOOD SLEEP: TAMING YOUR MIND

Still having trouble sleeping? Then it's likely that it's your mind keeping you up. We can be extremely tired and devoid of any strong emotions, but if the mind is chattering away, it'll keep sleep at bay. What can we do about that?

The final three days of this program are about addressing the mental side of not sleeping. It focusses on the three most common types of thought patterns that keep people awake – and what to do about them. Even if you don't think a particular day applies to you, try out each of the ideas here. It won't hurt to do something for one day. Sometimes it's not until we try these strategies that we realise that they do apply to us. We just never realised because we never paid close attention to our thoughts before. Paying attention to, and then changing, what's actually going on in our minds is a really useful skill that not many people employ. Don't be surprised if you initially find it difficult to identify what you're thinking. It's a new skill and you will get better the more you practise. And you're never going to catch all your thoughts, so don't worry about that either. The focus of these exercises is to find a way to let go of thoughts that keep you awake.

DAY 5

REFLECTION TIME

If there's a mental element to your lack of sleep, worry is the most likely culprit. You might be a naturally anxious person, fearful of what could happen and making plans to avoid these potential hazards throughout both the day and the night. Or you might be a super busy person with no time to think – except for that quiet time when your head hits the pillow and there's nothing left to distract you.

Almost everyone worries. It makes sense that part of the reason humans have survived so long and so well is because we have the capacity to anticipate potential danger and try to avoid it. Worry becomes an issue when the harm it is doing outweighs the good. If we are too anxious to function properly, too stressed to get a good night's sleep, then our worrying is out of control and needs to be reigned in.

We worry because we think we can fix something or stop it from happening by thinking about it. If this thinking leads to practical action that prevents or fixes a problem, then it is useful. But all too often our focus is on events that are unlikely to happen or that we can do nothing to prevent. For example, if you have a big presentation you need to do at work, you might worry that you won't come across as knowledgeable or your boss will think you're incompetent. That type of thinking is useful if you then brainstorm how you can be sure to look knowledgeable (for example, by doing extra research). That's under your control and will reduce the likelihood of your fears eventuating.

What's not helpful is imagining things going wrong that you can't take action on. Ultimately, you can't control your boss's reaction to the presentation, and yet a lot of useless worrying can occur imagining the worst things he could say, or trying to plan for a worst-case scenario that in reality is highly unlikely. Some of our deepest fears are to do with rejection or abandonment. Yet these possibilities are ultimately out of our control – we never really know how others will react to us, and in the heat of the moment, all your planning and worrying will go out of your mind if something terrible does actually happen.

What can we do to stop worry from impacting on our sleep? The solution is to start to engage in a practice called 'reflection time'. Reflection time is about setting aside time each day to indulge our worries. In doing so, we can allow ourselves to stop fretting at other times, without denying ourselves a chance to benefit from the useful aspects of worrying – such as creating to-do lists with practical actions that can alleviate a potential disaster.

Reflection time exercise

To begin using reflection time, set aside a time this evening for worrying. It's preferable not to have it during your wind-down hour, because worrying elevates our emotions and the mental effort is not conducive to sleep. If you have a flexible schedule, then sometime after your work day ends but before your sleep routine begins is ideal. Most people find their concerns build up during the course of the day, which is why I've suggested the evening. But the last thing you want to do is worry about reflection time, so make it at a time that suits you. Set aside thirty to sixty minutes for reflection time.

Once you've committed to a time slot, it's time to start paying attention to your thoughts. You need to learn to become aware of when you're worrying and what you're worrying about. You might start by catching yourself whenever you find you're no longer paying attention to the world around you. Missed what someone just said? Almost cut yourself while shaving because your mind was elsewhere? What were you thinking about? Were you worrying? Start carrying a small notebook or use the note-taking function on your phone to jot down a few words that capture the essence of what you're concerned about. Tell yourself that you will worry about that during your reflection time, and then go about your day as usual.

Each time you catch a worry, write it down. If you think about the same worries many times a day, just put a cross or a tick next to the original note, so you know how many times that concern cropped up during the day. As you write each thing down (or make another check mark), say to yourself: 'I'll worry about that during my reflection time'. Then do your best to focus on the present moment and what is happening right here and now.

When your reflection timeslot rolls around, get worrying. Sit down with a piece of paper or your computer/ mobile phone, go through each item on your list, and worry about it! You may find some worries have evaporated already due to changing circumstances. Others may not look like they're worth thinking about now they're on paper with their own special bit of time devoted to them. Others will still loom large. For these items, ask yourself:

'What can I do about this? Can I take any action?' If yes, then:

'What action?' and 'When?'

Use your answers to write yourself a to-do list, with the time you will take action and what you will do that will address your worries. For example, if you are worried that a comment your partner made about money means they are angry with the amount you spent on dinner last week, you could set a time the next day to ask them about their comment and to check if they are angry or not.

For the concerns that you can do nothing about, but which still bother you, worry away until reflection time is over. Using the previous example, perhaps you worry that your partner may experience resentment towards you with regards to money. There is only so much you can do

about this. Ultimately how they feel is up to them. So go nuts imagining the worst case scenario – maybe that it causes a break up. How would you feel? How would you cope? (The best way to explore your concerns is to write your worries down. Writing your thoughts down stops you going over the exact same thought several times, which is what tends to happen when you leave your worries in your head). Worry, worry, worry until you've had enough or exhausted all the possibilities. Then move on to the next item. Keep working through your list until reflection time is up.

On the first day, this process might seem huge, overwhelming, and terrifying. You might not get through the whole list. That's okay. Put it aside until the next reflection time, and worry then. Allocate some reflection time to worrying about the effectiveness of reflection time!

As you keep using reflection time a few things will start to happen:

You'll start to recognise, in the moment, when a concern isn't worth worrying about. You won't want to put it on your list, because you'll know it's a waste of time to worry about that particular thing. And you'll stop yourself from thinking about it right then and there. So your list will get shorter.

You'll also get better at prioritising. You'll learn to use reflection time to focus on the things that you can practically change first. You'll want to get the practical actions down. You'll start to see that it's these actions, rather than your worries, that can change your future.

You will still be left with a few concerns that you can do nothing about. You'll still worry. Recurring worries you might get a bit bored with. With a structure applied to it, and your increased thought awareness, you might find yourself getting sick of worrying about what you can't change. Or you might find that time really powerful for processing your fears. You can use writing, singing, or physically acting out your concerns to help this process. In doing so fully, without guilt, you can leave those worries firmly in reflection time and get on with the rest of your day when reflection time is over.

There are many good potential outcomes from reflection time. Do not worry that it will make your worrying worse! It will not. If you are prone to this thinking style, I guarantee you that you are spending more than 30-60 minutes of your day right now worrying– half worrying, repeat worrying, worrying about trying to stop worrying, worrying about trying to stop worrying and failing. You will worry less with reflection time. You will be a more effective worrier. In the first day, though, that's not going to happen. Day 5 is just about setting up this time and starting the journey of paying attention to what happens in your mind. Day 5 is the first day of creating a new habit that will take time to master. However, the benefits of the structure, when correctly applied, can be felt in just one day. Day 5 – reflection time. Go for it!

DAY 6

TO DO LISTS

Day 6 builds on the ideas of Day 5. Day 5 is about disengaging from our worries by becoming aware of them; giving them their own space so they don't overwhelm your whole day (and most importantly, your whole night). Day 6 amplifies the attention and importance we give to the 'to-do' list part of Day 5. As you'll remember, if there is something that you can do that will eliminate a worry, then set a time and do it!

Sometimes what keeps us up at night is not worry, but just thinking about all the things you'd like to be doing, but aren't. We stay up planning how we're going start exercising next week, or stand up to our boss about the extra work we got given today, or thinking about how we need to remember to get a present for our friend's birthday next week. We're not worrying: we're planning! But if you're like most people, all that thinking at night comes to nothing in the morning. We're exhausted and never get around to exercising, we chicken out and don't confront the boss, we forget the cake or change our mind and get them something else. All that thinking, planning and lost sleep time gets wasted.

On Day 6 we confront this wasted time. To do this, you'll need a piece of paper, a pen, and a very low light or lamp near the bed. If this will disturb your partner, you can keep these items in another room and go out of the room to use them. It's not ideal, but it might be a good compromise.

When you go to bed on Day 6, if you find yourself still awake after a period of time engaging in your relaxation practice, then notice what thoughts are going through your mind. Are you planning? Or are you worrying? Worries go onto your worry list, as described in Day 5, to be worried about during your next period of reflection time. If you find yourself planning, you need to start asking yourself some hard questions: Am I prepared to put a date and time for action on this plan, or am I just fantasising? If the answer is yes (for example, not forgetting the cake for your friend), then pick a date and a time, and write in on your list. Now you'll remember! No need to keep thinking about it and planning to remember the next day. If your mind wanders back to this task, gently remind yourself that you will take care of it tomorrow and return to your relaxation practice.

If you decide that you're not willing to put a date and time on this plan (e.g. you won't actually stand up to your boss) then you need to toss the idea. If you're not going to take action on the idea, and the thoughts are keeping you from sleeping, then the fantasy is not serving you. It is keeping you awake, and possibly emotionally aroused, for no good reason. If you can get yourself to understand the truth of this, you will be able to let the idea go.

Now it may be, using the boss example again, that you feel there is a good reason for the fantasy. You may feel it is necessary for you to work out your anger. You can't take it out on

your boss, but it has to go somewhere, right? Yes; and also No. It does need to be expressed, but playing out imaginary scenarios in your head is not the best way of moving past your anger. More effective strategies include starting to use some of the emotion-clearing relaxation strategies covered earlier, setting a date and time on that piece of paper next to the bed to release your anger through a conversation with a trusted friend, doing some writing about the incident and your feelings in the daytime, or setting a date with a pair of boxing gloves and a punching bag. These all allow you to feel and express a valid emotion without it affecting your sleep time.

The most important part of Day 6 is recognising that night time is not the time or place for anything other than sleep. There are other, better times to do the mental activities that we often do during the night. Sleep makes us function better in our day-to-day lives. When you are sleeping well, you address your challenges in the day more effectively, and this in turn helps you to sleep better the next night. It becomes a positive cycle. The reverse is also true. Once you start to lose sleep, you lose effectiveness during the day and the situations you wish you'd handled better (if only you were less tired), start to build up. Worrying, wishing and planning to fix them or improve next time then eat up precious sleep time the next night. You create a negative cycle. Day 6 is about breaking that cycle. So grab a notebook. Get self-analytical about what exactly it is that is keeping you awake, and either find a way to deal with it in the daytime or forget about it.

DAY 7

YOU'RE NORMAL

Are you sleeping wonderfully yet? If yes, then great! But if not, don't be discouraged. It's quite normal to take a while to fully integrate these techniques into your lifestyle. As you continue to practise, you'll learn more about the best sleep routine for you. You will get better at relaxation. You will get better at clearing worries and fantasies and becoming more action focused. Practice takes time. I've given you the building blocks for great sleep. Know that bigger benefits come with time and continual practice.

You need to use these techniques every day. You need to stick to your sleep schedule, practise relaxation, engage in your reflection time and keep writing your to-do lists. Trust me, you are not a no-sleep freak; the only person on the planet immune to sleep help and doomed to suffer sleep problems. The real secret is that pretty much everyone has experienced the 3am monster that attacks when you wake up tired, but with enough sleep behind you that you start thinking about all your problems. Three am seems to have the magical power to make everything look worse. The next morning you wake up with a headache and bleary eyes and berate yourself for all that pointless lost sleep time, but by then it's too late.

Why am I pointing all this out? Because it's important to remind yourself that you are normal. You need to understand that difficulty with sleeping happens to everyone. It's normal to blow things out of proportion at night. It's normal to get hooked into thoughts that seem silly the next day. It's normal to toss and turn and worry about how you're not asleep yet, even though you've learnt these techniques and think you should know better.

The final part of the mental approach to sleep is to understand that sometimes it's okay not to sleep. You can get hooked into thinking that you can't sleep and that you're not one of those people who can just go to sleep. That belief about yourself then interferes with your ability to stick to good sleep habits, and to use sleep tools like relaxation and to-do lists.

When we're tired, it's all too easy to think thoughts like 'this is too hard' and 'I'll never be a good sleeper'. Even less obviously destructive thoughts can wreak havoc with our sense of sleep self: 'I have to have eight hours sleep a night' is not literally true. Plenty of people need less (or more) than that. Plenty of people need eight hours but don't get it and they survive. Ultimately, our bodies will just crash when we desperately need sleep. We don't actually die from it. Of course we don't want to get to that point. But don't be discouraged if you don't get perfect results instantly, or ever, from practising sleep-management techniques. No one can guarantee perfect sleep, night after night.

Stress and negative life events affect everybody's ability to sleep. If you're an easily stressed person, or live a high-stress life, it's to be expected that your sleep quality won't be great unless you can change those elements. External stressors can sometimes be altered but sometimes not. What is always under our control is how we respond to them. An easily stressed person is just one whose responses are more sensitive than what is required by the situation. The techniques in the previous pages are about giving you the best chance for sleep, but they're not foolproof. However, if you use them appropriately and consistently, then you can rest (ha ha) assured that you are doing your best, under the circumstances, to get a good night's sleep.

If that's not acceptable to you, then it's time to look at your life as a whole. Do you need to make big life changes that will reduce the amount of stress in your life? Do you need to take the time to visit a psychologist and learn stress management techniques for managing your specific day time stressors? By now you may have realised that what keeps you up at night are actually physical complaints – you are worrying about, or focussed on, chronic pain for example. Plenty of physical illnesses and medications can also interfere with sleep. If you haven't already seen your doctor to rule out physical causes, please do so.

Day 7 focuses on being kind to ourselves about our sleep habits. Using reassuring language when talking about our sleeping, either to other people or to ourselves.

Have a look at the following examples of destructive or 'not normal' thoughts, and the more balanced thinking option. Do any of these apply to you? If you can't see your particular concern listed, see if you can use the examples to come up with a more balanced thought that alleviates your fear. A good way to do this is to imagine a friend came to you with your particular thought – what would you say to them to reassure them?

'I have to have eight hours sleep a night to cope' vs 'It's not ideal, but I can cope with a few hours sleep if I have to'.

'I should be able to sleep well every night' vs 'Everyone has trouble sleeping sometimes. I'm no different. I can improve my sleep with practice'.

'It always takes me a long time to get to sleep' vs 'Some nights I can fall asleep faster than others. I wonder what will happen tonight?'

'I can't function when I don't get sleep' vs 'I can still function when I don't sleep. Keeping up with my responsibilities is the best plan for when I don't sleep well'.

'I didn't get any sleep at all last night' vs 'Even though I feel like I didn't get any sleep, my body did get some rest. I did the best I could under the circumstances'.

'If I don't sleep, I'll die' vs 'Eventually I will fall asleep. Until then, I will encourage sleep by staying emotionally and mentally relaxed and sticking to my sleep routine'.

'I've tried everything and nothing works!' vs 'No matter the outcome, my best chance for sleep is to keep practising'.

'This is just who I am – I'll never be a good sleeper' vs 'Everyone has periods in their life where they don't sleep well. I'll get better at sleeping as I keep following my sleep routine and using relaxation, reflection time and to-do lists'.

The final word

Sleeping well is a combination of many factors. Some of these, such as physical ailments or external stress, are not in our power to remove. For these factors, we need to engage the help of professionals – whether that's about how best to manage pain, or how to adapt our lifestyle to minimise the effects of stress.

Some factors, such as how we focus our mind, what we put into our bodies, and the leisure activities we engage in, are almost completely under our control. These factors are the focus of this book, and I hope that you are sleeping better by employing the techniques described. However, if you have done absolutely everything you can physically, emotionally, mentally and practically to facilitate sleep and it still won't come, then sometimes it's just about letting go. Giving up alleviates the pressure of trying to sleep – which can be just another pressure that interferes with getting to sleep. So if sleep won't come, know that this is okay. You can lie quietly, enjoy the alone time, and keep yourself calm and mentally neutral. Go back to just focussing on your breathing. If you can't sleep, keeping calm and mentally relaxed is the next best thing for resting our body and mind. Don't worry – sleep will come in time.

Checklist – Mental Considerations

Have I set aside a time each day just to worry?

Do I confine my worrying just to reflection time?

Do I make specific to-do lists with dates and times for action?

Do I believe that having trouble with sleeping is normal and happens to everyone?

Can I let go of unhelpful thoughts about my sleeping?

If all else fails, can I accept sleeplessness and focus on the benefits of quiet rest instead?

Things I still need to do: