

## **Tips for sleeping**

We all know that a hot, milky drink and a warm bath are supposed to relax you before bed, but many of us still can't slip into slumber.

Ten million prescriptions for sleeping pills are written every year in England alone and a survey by Crampex has found that 86% of us suffer from sleep disturbance.

But you can trick yourself to sleep by trying these expert natural tips...

### **1. Inhale through your left nostril**

This yoga method is thought to reduce blood pressure and calm you. Holistic sleep therapist Peter Smith says: "Lie on your left side, resting a finger on your right nostril to close it. Start slow, deep breathing in the left nostril." Peter, says this technique is particularly good when overheating or menopausal hot flushes are preventing sleep.

### **2. Squeeze and relax**

Relaxing all your muscles can prepare your body for sleep. Anxiety expert Charles Linden says: "Lying on your back, take a deep, slow breath in through your nose and, at the same time, squeeze your toes tightly as if you are trying to curl them under your foot, then release the squeeze."

He adds: "On another slow breath, curl your foot up toward your knee, then release. Breathe again; contract your calf muscles, then your thighs, buttocks, belly, chest, arms, and so on until you have moved all the way up your body, squeezing and releasing the muscles one by one."

When you have gone from head to toe, your breathing should be steady and you should feel ready for sleep.

### **3. Try to stay awake**

Challenge yourself to stay awake – your mind will rebel! It's called the sleep paradox, says psychotherapist Julie Hirst ([worklifebalancecentre.org](http://worklifebalancecentre.org)). She explains: "Keep your eyes wide open, repeat to yourself 'I will not sleep'. The brain doesn't process negatives well, so interprets this as an instruction to sleep and eye muscles tire quickly as sleep creeps up."

### **4. Rewind your day**

Remembering the mundane detail in reverse order clears your mind of worries. Sammy Margo says: "Recall conversations, sights and sounds as you go. It helps you to reach a mental state that's ready for sleep."

## **5. Roll your eyes**

Sammy says that closing your eyes and rolling the balls up three times can do the job. She says: “It simulates what you do naturally when you fall asleep and may help trigger the release of your sleepy hormone, melatonin.”

## **6. Just imagine**

Visualisation meditation works best when you use at least three senses. Sammy explains: “Imagine yourself in a situation where you feel content – a tropical paradise, sailing on calm waters, walking in flower fields.

“As you explore your ‘happy place’ imagine smelling flowers, feeling grass or sand under your feet and hearing water lap against the boat. You should soon feel relaxed and drift off.”

## **7. Hum to yourself**

This yoga meditation generates an all-pervading sense of calm, says Dr Chris Idzikowski, Edinburgh Sleep Centre Director.

Sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, drop your shoulders, relax your jaw, but keep your mouth gently closed. Breathe in through your nose as deeply as is comfortable, ensuring your abdomen, not chest, rises.

Dr Idzikowski says: “Breathe gently out of your mouth, lips together so you hum. Try to hum for the whole out-breath. Notice how it vibrates in your chest. Focus fully on this vibration over six breaths then sit quietly for a moment. Tell yourself ‘I am ready for sleep’, get up slowly and go to bed.”

## **8. Press here!**

There are special points in the body which promote sleep when pressed gently but firmly. Dr Idzikowski suggests: “Put your thumb on the point between your eyebrows at the top of your nose, where there’s a slight indent. Hold for 20 seconds, release briefly and repeat twice more.

“Next, sit on the edge of the bed and put your right foot across your left knee. Find the slight indent between your big toe and second toe and press in the same way.

“Finally, still supporting your right foot, find the point just below the nail on the upper side of your second toe. Using the thumb and forefinger of your right hand, gently squeeze the toe.”

## **9. Find your trigger**

The key to this trick is to start the habit as you drift off during a period when you are sleeping well and then you can use it when you have difficulty.

Do something unusual, such as stroking your own cheek, as you nod off, says hypnotherapist Sharon Stiles “Focus all your attention on what the movement feels like,” says Sharon. Over successive nights, your body will learn to associate it with sleep and repeating it should convince your body it’s sleepy.

#### **10. Take a breather**

Breathing naturally slows as you fall asleep. The NightWave Sleep Assistant, £47.37 from Amazon.co.uk, projects a soft blue light, which slowly rises and falls on the ceiling. Synchronise your breathing with the wave as it becomes slower and you should fall asleep within a seven-minute cycle,

#### **11. Make a worry list**

Going over a to-do list in bed is a major cause of insomnia. Sharon Stiles says: “Often it’s because you’re frightened of forgetting what needs doing. So before bed, write your list on paper so you can forget it until next day. You could also imagine filing your thoughts in a cabinet. You’ll be calmer and more likely to sleep.”

#### **12. Empty your bladder**

As we age, we produce less of an anti-diuretic hormone that stops the kidneys making as much urine.

As a result we may develop Nocturia, the need to go to the loo several times during the night.

Avoid drinking fluids two hours before bedtime and use the double-voiding technique. “It means emptying the bladder twice by urinating a second time 10 to 15 minutes after the first time,” says Prof Merlin Thomas.

Cutting back on salt to no more than 8g a day also reduces loo visits, Japanese researchers found.

#### **13. Exercise between 4-7pm**

Moderate exercise can help you sleep, says Prof Paul Gringras. “It’s one of the best ‘sleep-medicines’ around. But like all medicines, there is a right and wrong way to use it.

“The timing can make a big difference. Exercise in the morning is unlikely to help, and exercise too close to bedtime is likely to cause problems. Try taking 20-30 minutes of exercise moderate for you, between 4pm and 7pm.” Walking or gardening will do.

#### **14. Go cherry picking**

“Cherries contain melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate our sleep patterns,” says nutritionist Anita Bean.

“Researchers found drinking cherry juice 30 minutes after waking and 30 minutes before the evening meal boosted sleep by 84 minutes and improved sleep quality in people with insomnia.”

### **Bonus Tips**

#### **Best temperature for sleep**

Choose bedding that’s breathable, comfortable and sleep-inducing. Use bedding with contouring, pressure sensitive mattress toppers, linen and temperature-sensitive duvets and pillows from

#### **Calm**

The word meditation might make you think of spiritual mumbo jumbo, but brain training techniques can be incredibly powerful for helping you drift off. Calm features a series of guided meditation sessions lasting up to 30 minutes that can help you clear your mind at night before you sleep. Other 'mindfulness' apps to look at include Headspace and Buddhify.

You can download the app for free, but it will try and up-sell you into a subscription.