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References

Stephenson, K. (2012). Self-Hypnosis to Promote Quality Sleep. *Positive Health*, (196), 1. Retrieved from <http://proxy1.ncu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ccm&AN=104480225&site=eds-live>

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Self-Hypnosis to Promote Quality Sleep

Sleep is a time when our mind and body rests, repairs and rejuvenates and good quality sleep improves our health, vitality and performance. Conversely, poor sleep patterns and sleep deprivation is detrimental to both our physical and psychological health.

When our sleep patterns are interrupted, we soon begin to feel out of balance and a cycle of sleep deprivation begins. We cannot sleep so we lie awake and worry about this, which leads to wakefulness and so the cycle continues. Self-hypnosis is a very useful to promote deep relaxing quality sleep. It can be a valuable tool to relax both mind and body and help us to let go of unwanted thoughts and replace them with more beneficial thought patterns. A number of medical conditions can interfere with sleep patterns. In some cases where there is an underlying cause for insomnia such as depression, medical help should be sought. More common reasons for insomnia are those stemming from anxiety and an over active mind.

When we sleep, the body goes through a number of stages of sleep that can be measured by EEG, which monitor brainwave activity of people sleeping. The first stage is light sleep and progressing to the fourth stage - deep restful sleep. This cycle repeats approximately every 90 minutes with periods of Rapid Eye Movement REM in which dreaming takes places. This cycle can be interrupted by stress resulting in prolonged periods of light sleep. The deepest and most beneficial stage of the sleep cycle is stage four; self-hypnosis can help the body enter this stage.

Insomnia is often a sign that the body is out of balance and self-hypnosis can help to restore the body's equilibrium and enhance good quality restful sleep. The involuntary nervous system is divided into two parts, the parasympathetic and the sympathetic. The role of both of these parts has a significant effect on our levels of stress and sleep patterns.

The role of the sympathetic nervous system is to put our body on alert; it mobilizes our body's reserves and creates the flight or fight response. It causes the body to prepare for an emergency by increasing

the heartbeat to increase blood supply, muscles tense and breathing becomes faster to increase oxygen intake, adrenaline and noradrenalin is released into the bloodstream. The parasympathetic nervous system is designed to keep the mind and body in harmony and balance, promoting functions associated with growth, repair and relaxation and maintains the body functions in a calm and normal state. Stress and anxiety can lead to an imbalance between the parasympathetic and the sympathetic parts of the nervous system. This can contribute to symptoms of insomnia, as we need to be in a state of parasympathetic dominance to induce sleep. However prolonged and chronic stress can result in a heightened state of sympathetic dominance, which makes it more difficult to sleep. Hypnosis helps to break this cycle and encourages dominance of the parasympathetic system. This is highly beneficial for deep relaxing sleep.

Self-hypnosis techniques can be particularly helpful to help to replace negative thought patterns with more positive thoughts. This is, however, only one part of the equation in promoting deep relaxing sleep. The other part of the equation is creating an environment conducive with total rest and relaxation. Many people with sleep problems are aware that avoiding stimulants such as caffeine is beneficial. However they often place less importance on the effects of sleep on mental stimulation. Avoid doing mentally stimulating work at least one hour before going to bed to slow down mental stimulation and switch off more easily. If you associate your bed with mental activity this can disturb sleeping patterns. Ensuring your room is free of things associated with work such as reports, unpaid bills etc. can be very beneficial. The key here is to set up positive sleep associations. You can also use the power of your imagination to trigger a variety of cues to help you leave your worries aside whilst you sleep. As you brush your teeth for example, you can imagine cleaning your mind of worry and anxiety. As you take off your clothes you can imagine lifting off any tension and worrying thoughts. Let yourself be creative and find other ways to leave behind the concerns of the day using imagery.

Self-hypnosis is a powerful tool to help deal with unwanted thoughts. It is a very safe and effective way to aid restful sleep. You can learn hypnosis techniques via a qualified practitioner or there are many self-hypnosis CDs on the market. You can also learn to enter natural trance states from books. Regular practice can help you to achieve a deep level of relaxation; an anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body.

The following self-hypnosis exercise can be used to aid restful sleep. It allows you to relax and enter a state of mind known as the hypnagogic state. This state is a natural part of the sleep process and helps you drift off to sleep.

Beginning with a progressive muscle relaxation that involves relaxation of various muscle groups sequentially. To begin, make yourself comfortable in bed and start with the muscles in your feet, tense all the muscles in your feet, hold for about 10 seconds and slowly relax. Now move up from your calf muscles to your thighs, buttock and abdominal muscles all the way up your back, paying particular attention to the muscles in your neck and shoulders that often carry much tension. Continue into your face, eyes and jaw. This exercise should not be rushed and this is a classic relaxation technique used in many different therapeutic interventions.

The next step is to learn how to use breathing to feel calm and relaxed in order to wind down in preparation for sleep. When we are anxious, we instinctively adopt shallow rapid breathing from the upper chest. The aim here is to make use of the whole lung capacity, creating the optimum balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide, resulting in an almost instant feeling of calmness. Inhale deeply

through your nose and imagine filling your stomach so it expands like a balloon, then exhale, taking twice as long as you did to inhale fully, expelling all the air and deflating the balloon. Controlling your breathing will change your emotional state, as it is difficult to succumb to negative emotions whilst breathing deeply.

As you begin to focus your attention inwards, you can now use a simple counting technique to deepen your level of relaxation. Counting down from ten to one slowly and with each number allowing yourself to feel a little more relaxed. Some people imagine this as going down a staircase to a peaceful relaxing place. Others simply allow themselves to experience the sensation of floating down. Enjoy the tranquillity of your special place as you relax even deeper.

At this stage of relaxation a hypnotherapist or self-hypnosis CD will use a variety of positive suggestions to enhance sleep whilst your mind is in a receptive state. You can also use positive self-suggestions such as "I fall asleep easily and effortlessly whenever I want to fall asleep". It can be useful to think about your mind and body working in harmony to slow down internal chatter. You may like to notice the sensation of your body slowing down and unwinding and to imagine your mind slowing down like a floating leaf coming to rest. Listen to your own internal chatter; if any negative thoughts and worries try to surface in your mind, simply let them pass through your mind without allowing them to settle, imagine them floating away to a more appropriate time that will not interfere with your special sleep time. Another technique, which is particularly effective, is to imagine someone else sleeping. So just let your mind drift to imagine what it is like for someone else to fall asleep. Notice their body so comfortable and relaxed as just drifting off to sleep on a soft warm bed. Notice the rise and fall of their ribcage and how peaceful and tranquil they appear and imagine what it is like for them to be asleep.

Self-hypnosis is not a panacea for insomnia, but it is a useful technique to help you work with your own inner resources to enable you to drift off to sleep deeply, peacefully and naturally.

Deep Relaxing Sleep

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Further Information

The author has developed a range of self-hypnosis audio CDs using a combination of hypnotherapeutic suggestions, NLP techniques and creative visualisation, including a CD entitled Deep Relaxing Sleep. The CD is available from www.innerchange.co.uk To receive £5 discount for PH readers use discount code SH250.

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**Source:** Positive Health