



## How To Deal with Sleeplessness \*

by  
**Peter Field**

Sleeplessness is something that affects most of us at one time or another and as such it's nothing to be overly concerned about. Before too long, we usually find ourselves returning to our normal sleep patterns and behaviour and things just seem to naturally fall back into place.

Yet research has found that around 30% to 50% of people report being affected by insomnia, while about 10% report suffering from chronic insomnia.

Exactly how much sleep each person needs is, of course, entirely subjective.

Some of us seem to need more and some less. But what is certain is that not everyone needs the much quoted standard 8 hours sleep. And worrying that we are not getting those full eight hours can complicate and increase sleeplessness itself.

When discussing sleeplessness, it's important to remember that insomnia is a symptom and not any kind of diagnosis. If you have been experiencing sleeplessness over a considerable period of time, it really is wise to visit your doctor, just to check that there are no underlying medical reasons.

Once you have reassured yourself that there is no physical reason for your sleeplessness, you then have the responsibility of dealing with it.

First of all, what do we know about our body's need for sleep?

- Sleep is as important as food - Though no-one fully understands sleep itself, what is clear is that we do need it. Just how much we need, however, is far less clear. Children and younger people are known to need more and, as we age, we naturally seem to find ourselves needing less sleep.

- Lack of sleep affects the appetite - The hormone which regulates hunger is called leptin. Too little sleep causes leptin levels to drop. Since leptin is the trigger that notifies the brain that the body has eaten enough, lack of this important hormone can affect our eating patterns and consequently our weight.

- Affects of insufficient sleep may go unnoticed at first - Chances are that you may not notice how tired you really are. In order to compensate for serious lack of sleep, your body will automatically take 5 to 15 second micro-naps, dipping into and out of brainwave sleep. Since this can happen with the eyes open, often it happens without you realising it. Obviously, this is not the ideal state in which to be operating machinery, driving a car or doing anything that requires your full focus and attention.

Whether or not lack of sleep is cumulative seems to depend on which authority you listen to. There are those experts in sleep research who maintain that we do indeed build up a cumulative 'sleep debt' and there are those who firmly oppose this idea.

What few would disagree on, however, is that sleep is an individual thing, with each person having his or her own needs that alter and fluctuate in different circumstances and at varying times in the life journey.

Here are a few things you can do in order to enhance your sleep experience and get the sleep that you need:

- Banish clocks from the bedroom - Understand and accept that you really don't need to know the time until it's time to get out of bed. Lying awake watching the clock can only complicate and add to the anxiety of sleeplessness.

- Do not watch the news - Thought-provoking documentaries, intense dramas, overly stimulating TV programmes and using the computer before going to bed are all ill-advised when it comes to falling and remaining asleep. The mind needs to be in the best position to unwind when we sleep and these will elicit exactly the opposite state.

- Manage internal dialogue - Reserve the bed for sleeping and for making love. If you find yourself going over things again and again in your mind before going to sleep, get out of bed and commit your thoughts to paper or perhaps to a tape recorder.

- Get out of bed after 25 minutes - If you are unable to fall asleep within this time, get up and do something. No point in lying there worrying. Choose a boring, repetitive task that does not stimulate the mind: washing the dishes, folding clothes, dusting etc. Return to bed only when tired and ready to sleep. Stay up until then.

- Try to stay awake - This strategy is called 'paradoxical intent', or reverse psychology and will work only if you focus on staying awake, but not on anything else. Be sure to concentrate on the task of staying awake above any other thought.

- Learn systematic relaxation or self-hypnosis - Teach yourself how to let go of stress with relaxation exercise, or better yet, by learning self-hypnosis. Time invested in this can be deducted from time wasted by not sleeping.

Research has shown that even those who believed they got little or no sleep at all, did in fact fall asleep without realising that this was the case, proving that perceptions can indeed be unreliable.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when dealing with sleeplessness and insomnia is that inconvenient and worrying though it can be, your body and mind will find ways to cope.

Trust in this and sooner or later nature will do the rest.

**\*IMPORTANT:** This Information is not a replacement for medical advice. If you suspect that you have a sleep disorder you are advised to visit your doctor or other qualified health care professional.

**Peter Field is a leading British hypno-psychotherapist and originator of AIROTherapy™ with practices in Birmingham and London, UK. He is the author of numerous articles on psychotherapy, hypnosis and health and his articles are currently published internationally by more than 200 different websites. He is a Member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and Fellow of the Royal Society of Health. For more of his interesting and informative articles visit his website:**

**<http://www.peterfieldhypnotherapy.co.uk>**

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