

IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP 101



Andrea ~ A Little Psychology



WHY IS IT THAT WE OFTEN WAKE THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT WHEN WE ARE FEELING STRESSED OR ANXIOUS?

The answer to this question relates to the hormone adrenaline, which our bodies release to help us prepare for (or when we are in the middle of) a stressful situation. Our adrenaline levels replenish in our bodies throughout the night, when our bodies are resting. So, if you fall asleep thinking about any unpleasant demands you might expect for the following day (eg, "I can't miss the early train tomorrow...I have that important meeting or deadline...hopefully Bill will have responded to my urgent email, etc), your brain is thinking that you are going to need lots of adrenaline to help you get through the day.

As your adrenaline starts to replenish, or 'the tank starts to fill up', your body fills up too quickly with too much adrenaline and that is what causes you to wake up. On a similar note, if you've had too much adrenaline flowing through you at bed time, your body and mind would be too alert to help you fade into sleep.

TIPS FOR REDUCING THE EFFECTS OF ADRENALINE ON OUR SLEEP:

Have a calm bedtime routine. That may involve a 2-min stretching or meditation session, reading, or journaling; a helpful journaling strategy is called “write and chuck” where you simply put pen to paper, and start writing whatever comes to mind. You don’t worry about grammar or spelling, and you don’t need to read over it. You are simply removing the thoughts from your head and placing them on paper (which you can discard afterwards if you want).

Writing a to-do list an hour or two before bed can also help put your mind at ease or put thoughts into some kind of order. A to-do list enables you to feel somewhat in control of the situation, and is conducive to some proactive behaviours.



OTHER SLEEP HYGIENE TIPS:



1

Ensure you get rid of clocks, or turn your clock away so that you cannot see the time in the middle of the night. When you are awake and tossing and turning, watching the clock ticking, you are going to get agitated. Your mind will be creating the mind story of: 'oh no, I've got to get up in 3 hours...I am going to be so tired... How will I cope through the day?!' These thoughts are most definitely not conducive to sleep.

What do you want to tell yourself then? 'I'm resting...my body is horizontal, my eyelids are closed so my eyes are resting too'. This is not a magical mindset that will bring instant sleep, however, it will help keep your body and mind as relaxed as possible in order to invite sleep in.

OTHER SLEEP HYGIENE TIPS:

1

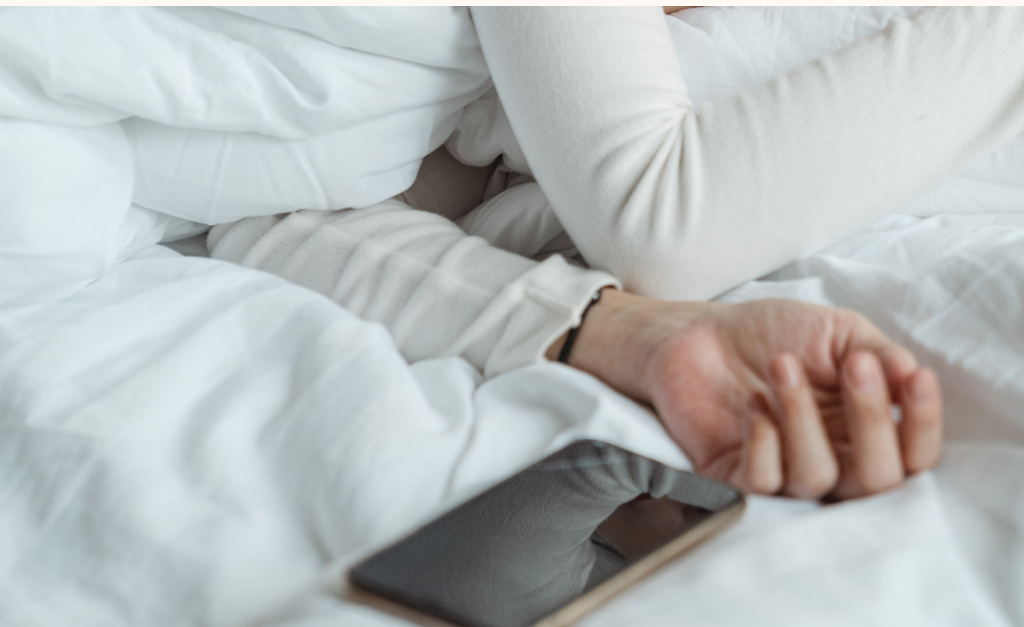
Devices.

Research has shown that the blue light emitted from our devices confuses our circadian rhythm/our internal body clock.

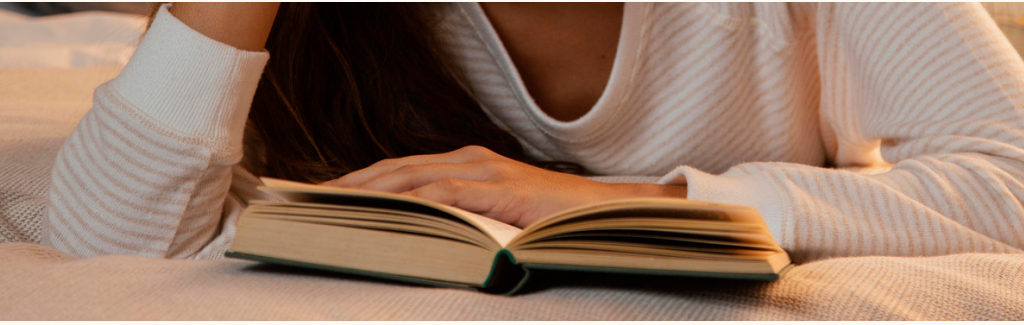
Cells in our eyes, sensitive to blue light, send information to our pineal gland to reduce melatonin (hormone that makes you sleepy) production (to keep you awake) when we are sitting in front of a device. It has now been proven that using your smartphone before bed causes a 67 minute delay in the release of melatonin (and if you use a tablet/ipad, there is a 97 minute delay).

3

Have a consistent sleep/awake time.



OTHER SLEEP HYGIENE TIPS:



4 Conditioning your mind for sleep. Your mind takes cues from your environment to prepare for sleep. Hence, your bedroom should ideally be for sleep and sex only. If you are checking emails, or if you are finishing some sort of work, your brain will be in alert mode and would have more difficulty associating your bed/room with sleep.

Have a nighttime ritual- this could involve doing some light reading, giving yourself a hand massage, doing some before-bed yoga poses, listening to a sleep story.

If you have gone to bed, and you find that approximately 15-30 mins later you are still tossing and turning, get up, do something relaxing and then try again.

5 Other tips you may have already heard about: avoid any kind of stimulating medication/caffeine in the afternoon, keep your room cold. Avoid alcohol

6 An evidence-based relaxation technique aimed at helping with sleep is called Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

TIME FOR REFLECTION:

What changes to your bedtime routine do you think you would benefit from making?

Making changes to our habits takes time and effort- choose one of the above strategies to implement to your bedtime routine tonight.

‘Today’s new behaviour is the
beginning of tomorrow’s new
habit’ - Robin Sharma

