



SOMNANCE

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Stimulus Control Therapy

Many people develop "bad habits" when faced with a chronic insomnia, such as frequently watching the clock and "counting down" the time remaining before needing to start their day, or spending extended periods of time in bed without sleeping, or worrying about the consequences of having a bad night of sleep.

Stimulus control is employed to break negative associations of the bed as a place of frustration. This is an important technique of cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia.

Guidance N 1 Use bed only for its purpose

You only should use your bed for sleeping (and intimacy).

Stop watching the clock, you may remove the clock from the bedroom if this is possible.

Guidance N 2 Go to bed when sleepy

It is important to wait to feel 'sleepy' before going to bed. Feeling fatigued or exhausted is different from feeling 'sleepy'. Feeling exhausted is not an indicator that you're ready to fall asleep. You know when you are feeling sleepy – your eyes feel droopy, you find yourself yawning, nodding off or struggling to stay awake. These sleepy feelings will be an indication that sleep pressure is high and that your body clock is now set for sleep.

If are concerned that you never feel sleepy a good guide as to when you are likely to be starting to feel sleepy is from your one week of sleep diary. Look at your diary and see what time you think you usually fall asleep. This is probably the time you will start feeling sleepy

Waiting to go to bed when you are sleepy will increase your chances of falling asleep quickly but will not guarantee it. So if you go to bed feeling sleepy, but you are not asleep within about 15 minutes (guess – don't use the bedroom clock), get up, go into another room, and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy again. This helps breaking the association of the bed as a place of frustration or dread.

This is not an easy instruction to follow, especially if it is warm and comfortable in bed and cold out of bed. You might find yourself thinking "if you just stay in bed another few minutes I might fall asleep". But don't cheat, stick to the quarter-hour rule. In the colder months, keep another room warm and have something warm ready to put on when you need to get out of bed after a quarter hour of wakefulness.

Fully expect to be getting out of bed perhaps several times in the first few nights of therapy. Don't worry about these instructions – just do them! When you do get up, do some relaxing activity such as reading, watching television or listening to music or audio books, mindful colouring but always under dim lighting. Avoid eating, smoking, alcohol, or caffeine drinks. The idea is to allow sleepiness to build up again.

Guidance N 3 Return to bed when sleepy again

Once you feel sleepy again, go back to bed. If you still can't sleep, keep repeating the process until you fall asleep within a quarter hour. You will eventually fall asleep quickly at some point during the night. Gradually over several nights you will become sleepy earlier, you will have to get out of bed on fewer times on subsequent night, and you will fall asleep earlier and get more sleep. This can take some perseverance over a week or so. But stick with it, following these instructions produces improvement. The investment of some effort in the short term will be worth it in the long term.

Guidance N 4. Do not "catastrophize" when faced with a "bad night"

Even though you will get less sleep in the first week or two of this therapy and may start to feel sleepy at times during the day or in the evening (such as when watching TV), avoid falling asleep. Stand up and stretch or become active doing something. As mentioned above the increasing sleep pressure in this therapy is important for it to work. Welcome the sleepiness, it will help you. Although a brief nap of less than 15 minutes should not undermine the sleep pressure, it may be difficult to ensure the nap is only brief. Better to avoid taking a daytime nap until your insomnia has resolved.

Putting the day to rest: constructive worry

1. Set aside 20 minutes in the early evening, the same time every night if possible. Around 7-8 pm.
2. Sit down somewhere you are not going to be disturbed.
3. All you need is a notebook, your diary and a pen.
4. Think of what has happened during the day. How events have gone? How do you feel about the kind of day it has been?
5. Write down some of the main points. Put them to rest by committing them to paper. Write down what you feel good about and also what has troubled you.
6. Write down anything you feel you need to do in a "to do list" with steps that you can take to tie any loose ends or unfinished business.
7. Now think about tomorrow and what's coming up. Consider things that you are looking forward to as well as things that may cause you worry.
8. Write down your schedule in your diary. Or check if it is already there.
9. Write down anything you are unsure about and make a note in your diary of a time in the morning when you are going to find out about that.
10. Try to use your 20 minutes to leave you feeling more in control. "Close the book on the day".
11. What it comes to bedtime, remind yourself that you have already dealt with all these things if they come into your mind.
12. If new thoughts come up in bed, note them down on a piece of paper at your bedside to be dealt with the following morning.

Give up "Trying to Sleep" Paradoxical intention

1. Try to stay awake for as long as possible rather than focus on intending to fall asleep.
2. Lie comfortably in your bed with the light off, but keep your eyes open.
3. Give any effort to fall asleep.
4. Give up any concerns about still being awake.
5. When your eyelids feel like they want to close, say to yourself "just stay awake for another couple of minutes..."
6. Don't purposefully make yourself stay awake, but shift focus off attempting to fall asleep.