

Sweet Dreams?

If falling asleep is a nightmare for you, here are some tips to make the thought of going to bed less frightening.

Almighty God, who created the universe with unparalleled wisdom, also created your body to need rest. In His wisdom God made rest a foundational principle for life on Earth.

The Bible says, "On the seventh day, having finished His task, God rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when He rested from His work of creation" (Gen. 2:2-3, NLT).

If you are suffering because of not getting enough sleep, rest assured. God has provided wisdom to help you to gain a better understanding of the reasons for your fatigue so you can begin feeling better soon.

Many professions in today's stressed-out world create fatigue and encourage sleep disorders. It is believed that a century ago the average person slept about eight or nine hours per night. Today, the average individual sleeps seven to 7-1/2 hours a night.

Our modern lifestyles are so full that there's never enough time to get everything done, and consequently we tend to short ourselves on sleep. We end up paying for our many activities with drowsiness and fatigue.

A good night's sleep is just as important as a healthy diet and regular exercise. But our modern lives, often filled with worry, stress and many different pressures, can also lead to many types of sleep disorders. Insomnia is the most common one of these.

THE NIGHTMARE OF INSOMNIA

As you start to doze off, a million different thoughts flood your head. The clock ticks more and more loudly as you wait to fall asleep.

Finally you get out of bed and drink or eat something, only to be confronted by the same sleeplessness when you return. By the time the sunlight breaks through the window, your eyes are burning, your brain is cloudy and you begin to panic over how you'll ever make it through the day at work feeling as you do.

More than 50 percent of adults in the United States experience insomnia at least a few times a week. This simply means that you have problems falling asleep and staying asleep, or you wake up too early in the morning and are unable to go back to sleep.

Insomnia has many different causes: medical problems such as chronic pain (especially arthritis), fibromyalgia, degenerative disc disease and any other painful medical condition.

For women, menopause can be the culprit. Its trademark hot flashes in the middle of the night commonly cause insomnia. Women who suffer with painful menstrual cramping can experience bouts of insomnia as well.

Other health problems commonly associated with chronic sleeplessness include asthma, heart disease, respiratory disease, Alzheimer's disease and headaches. Heartburn can be another culprit.

Medications are also another common cause of insomnia. Here are some well-known culprits:

Decongestants and other cold medications

Appetite suppressants

Certain antidepressants

Corticosteroids such as Prednisone

Estrogen-replacement drugs

Thyroid hormones
Some blood pressure medications
Pain relievers containing caffeine

Psychological problems are a major factor in insomnia. Individuals suffering with anxiety often have difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep.

On the other hand, those who are depressed usually have trouble staying asleep. They often wake up early and have trouble falling back to sleep.

However, I believe the most common cause of insomnia is excessive stress and tension.

ARE YOU LOSING SLEEP OVER STRESS?

We live in a fast-paced society with less time to complete more and more tasks. When you combine normal, everyday stress in the home with an unexpected illness, accident, divorce, job loss, problems with children or financial struggles, life can get pretty overwhelming.

But all is not lost. Dealing with stress and pressure through exercise and a number of valuable lifestyle changes may be all that's required for you to enjoy once again the refreshing rest you need.

Exercise. Adding some form of exercise to your schedule is one of the best ways to improve the quality of your sleep. Aerobic exercise helps you to fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.

Those who exercise regularly also spend a greater amount of time in the most restorative, repairing stages of sleep. Therefore, they awaken more refreshed and have much more energy throughout the day. But don't exercise within three hours of bedtime, for this can actually cause insomnia.

You don't have to join a gym. Simply take a brisk walk, cycle,

go dancing or get involved in any other aerobic activity that elevates the heart rate for about twenty to thirty minutes four times a week. This will help you to lose weight, reduce stress and improve your sleep.

Choose an aerobic exercise you enjoy, and you won't become bored with it. Get a partner—a friend or your spouse—and if you choose walking, vary your experiences by going to different parks or malls for a change of scenery.

Walk slowly enough so that you can carry on a conversation, but quickly enough so that you cannot sing. Over time, you should notice that your sleep improves dramatically.

In addition to getting exercise, making some changes in your environment will also help you to sleep better.

Plan Your Sleep Environment. Limit your bedroom to sleep. Don't study, eat, work on a computer, watch television or do any activity in your bedroom other than sleep.

Most patients claim that watching television does not cause insomnia, but some patients are aggravated by it. Reading the Bible or a novel may help you to fall asleep—or can keep you up. Therefore, read only if it helps you to fall asleep.

Keep your bedroom uncluttered. Try to keep your bedroom uncluttered as much as possible to avoid stressful distractions.

Don't go to bed unless you are sleepy. If you're not sleepy when bedtime comes, try taking a warm bath, reading the Bible, having a massage or doing any other activity that helps you to wind down.

Keep your bedroom dark. Make sure your bedroom has no light shining into it from the street or from a nightlight. You might need to cover your digital clock since clocks are usually lighted.

Remove noise. Your room should be free from distracting noises, ringing phones, honking horns, sirens and other sounds that could disrupt your sleep. If you cannot control some of the noise, get a machine that reproduces sounds such as ocean waves, raindrops or even white noise.

Is the temperature cozy? Keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature. The key is that you should feel neither too hot nor too cold.

Get rid of the Goldilocks complex. You are going to spend approximately one-third of your life in bed. Make sure your mattress and pillow enable you to sleep comfortably.

By creating the right atmosphere for sleep, many people eliminate their insomnia. Ultimately, it's not just how much stress you encounter that determines how well you sleep. What's important is whether or not you are choosing to rest in God.

REST ASSURED

One person's life can be full of stress-producing events and situations, and yet this person will be at rest. Another individual's life can be comparatively stress-free, and yet this individual might be filled with tension, turmoil, panic and distress.

Peace comes from abiding in Christ (see John 15:1-17). This simply means giving Him all your cares and concerns and receiving His wisdom, peace, power and love.

If you react to stress with rage, fear, resentment or any other deadly emotion, you're liable to lose a lot of sleep. But if you react with faith, trust and reassurance that God is in control, you'll continue to sleep like a baby through every ripple and wave you encounter.

Today we live under the grace of God that was purchased for us by Christ Jesus. We must refuse to carry around the weight of

the daily tension, anxiety, fear and stress of the world.

Living wisely includes enjoying the benefits of refreshing, restoring sweet sleep. Dragging through your days fatigued and tossing through your nights awake is not healthy or wise. With sound wisdom and God's help, I believe you can begin to put those endless nights of sleeplessness behind you.

God promises to bless you with the gift of rest. Proverbs 3:24 assures us, "You can lie down without fear and enjoy pleasant dreams" (NLT).

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