



Session 4

Sleep, Stress, and Relaxation

Lesson 1: Stress and Sleep

The Links between Stress & Insomnia

In this session we're going to talk about stress, sleep, and relaxation techniques.

Stress and insomnia often go hand-in-hand:

- Insomnia is one of the first signs of stress.
- Stress can make it hard to go to sleep and stay asleep.
- Sleep research shows that many of the negative effects of sleep loss may, in fact, be due to stress.

Almost all people with insomnia have experienced insomnia because of stress:

- Major stressful life events are the most common causes of insomnia
- Most people have a harder time sleeping on stressful days.

Remember: stress also plays a strong role in getting chronic insomnia. This happens because negative sleep thoughts can set off negative emotions that then cause insomnia.

Effects of Stress

Stress affects your body in the following ways:

- It speeds up your brain waves
- It makes your heart rate and breathing more active
- It raises stress hormones in the body, even at night

All these effects reduce deep sleep. This makes for lighter and less restful sleep.



Lesson 2: Relaxation Techniques and Sleep

The Relaxation Response

Since we know that stress disrupts sleep, a lot of research has focused on the use of relaxation techniques to help people sleep. Relaxation techniques such as biofeedback, progressive muscle relaxation, and deep breathing help treat insomnia.

These techniques help you relax.

Improve Sleep with Relaxation Response

The relaxation response improves sleep in three ways:

- When you relax during the day, your stress response will not be as strong. This reduces the chance that stress hormones will be elevated at night.
- When done at bedtime or after waking up, the relaxation response helps to turn off negative sleep thoughts, quiet the brain, and relax the body.
- Also, it helps to quiet the brain by producing a brain wave pattern that is similar to Stage 1 sleep. Remember: Stage 1 sleep is the state between waking and sleeping).

By practicing the relaxation response at bedtime or after waking up at night it is easier to enter Stage 1 sleep and then the other stages of sleep (Stage 2, deep sleep, and dream sleep).

Lesson 3: Relaxation Techniques

Learning To Use Relaxation Techniques

There are several steps to using relaxation techniques to help people sleep:

Step 1: Relax your muscles.

Step 2: Relax your breathing. Under stress, we tend to breathe using short, shallow, irregular chest breaths, or we hold our breath. When we are relaxed, we breathe with the abdomen using slower, deeper breaths.

Demonstration: You can practice “belly breathing” simply by placing one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Without trying to slow or deepen breathing, simply focus on breathing with your belly. If you are belly breathing, only the hand on your stomach will rise and fall.

Step 3: Get your attention away from everyday thoughts by choosing a simple word like “one”, “relax”, “peace”, “heavy”, or any other word, and focusing on the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Repeat the word silently each time you exhale.

Step 4: Let relaxation happen at its own pace. Do not “try” to relax, and do not worry about whether you are relaxing. If you get distracted return your attention to the word that you are repeating.

Guided Audio Instruction

Click on the guided audio MP3 link on the Healthy Sleep homepage to download a 20 minute guided relaxation. It will teach you how to use body relaxation, breathing, and visual imagery to relax your mind and body and fall asleep more easily. If you can, copy the audio file to a CD or MP3 player, so that you can eventually listen to it in bed.

When you have 20 minutes, find a quiet place and a comfortable position and try the relaxation techniques. At first, many people find that it is easier to relax the body but harder to quiet the mind. With practice, you will be able to relax your body and mind easier.



Lesson 4: Practice Relaxing

Practicing Relaxation During the Day

Before using relaxation techniques to help you sleep, it is helpful to practice for 20 minutes during the day or early evening for 1 week. This will allow you to get comfortable with the process and make it more effective when you use it to help you sleep. In Session 5, we will review these techniques to help you fall asleep or after waking up during the night.

Relaxation Practice Tips

Here are some tips for practicing the relaxation techniques during the day or evening for the next week:

- The more you practice, the better the technique will work for you.
- Practice in a comfortable place and position. The best place to practice your techniques during the day is on your bed, so that you can learn to relax in bed.
- Choose a regular time of the day for your 20-minute relaxation time. Afternoon may be the best time to practice, since we often want to nap at that time. If you doze off this is a good sign that your brain will associate the techniques with sleepiness. Remember, napping before 3PM for less than 45 minutes will not disrupt your sleep at night.



Lesson 5: Goals for Week 4

Then and Now

Now that you've completed Session 4, in addition to your goals from the prior weeks as usual, your new goal is to practice your 20-minute relaxation exercise during the day or early evening.

Remember to do the following this week:

- Complete your sleep diary.



SLEEP, STRESS, AND RELAXATION

Key Concepts and Goals: Week 4

Key Concepts

You do not have to worry about getting 8 hours of sleep to stay healthy

You do not have to worry about getting 8 hours of sleep to function effectively during the day

Sleep loss does not always have adverse consequences on daytime functioning

In most cases, your performance will not suffer significantly if you obtain core sleep

You are probably getting more sleep than you realize

In most cases, the worst thing that will happen after a poor night's sleep is that your mood may be impaired for the day

It is not just how much sleep you lose but also your negative sleep thoughts that affect how you function during the day

Goals

Complete the Sleep Diary each morning

Use the bedroom primarily for sleep

Limit time in bed before lights out and after waking up to 30 minutes

Follow the "½ hour-½ hour" rule

Get out of bed within 30 minutes of your arising time goal

Arising time goal:

Limit the time you allow for sleep (lights out to out of bed) to one hour more than your average sleep duration

_____ + 1 hour = _____

Avg Sleep Duration

Time Allowed for Sleep

Do not go to bed before your earliest allowable bedtime goal

_____ - _____ = _____

Arising Time Goal

Time Allowed for Sleep

Earliest Bedtime

Work on medication reduction goal

Use positive sleep thoughts to replace negative sleep thoughts

Practice daytime relaxation

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