

Meditation and Sleep Disorders

Meditation can be an effective way to calm the mind before bedtime and to alleviate sleep disorders. Ever had a night, or a string of nights, when you couldn't sleep because of troublesome thoughts or worries? Of course, we all have. Meditation is an excellent way to control those thoughts and is a safe and simple way to balance your physical, emotional, and mental states. Meditation can help you pull your mind away from concerns about the past or future and focus on the present moment.

Meditation is not so much an emptying of the mind as it is a calming of the mind. One of the first things people realize when they begin meditating is how fast and furious their thoughts bombard them when they try to be still.

One novice meditator found this to be the case when he signed up for a local class on meditation. On the first night of instruction, he was told to lie on the floor and simply pay attention to his breathing for ten minutes. He thought to himself, "That's it? That'll be easy." He closed his eyes and, within seconds, it was like someone had pushed the play button on his mental VCR. Work hassles, bills, errands, plots from TV programs, and more ran through his mind like an old silent film set on fast-forward. By the time the ten minutes had elapsed, he felt more tense than when he started.

But the experience gave him a clue about why he was having so much trouble falling asleep at night and why he felt so uptight and hurried all the time. After several weeks of participating in the class and practicing what he learned, he was gradually able to start roping in some of his worrisome thoughts and found that he could fall asleep much easier when he slipped into bed at night.

During meditation, the pulse rate slows, blood pressure falls, blood supply to the arms and legs increases, levels of stress hormones drop, and brain waves resemble a state of relaxation found in the early stages of sleep. These are all physical changes that can be brought about by learning to clear your mind of clutter and focus your thoughts. You can use meditation to clear and refresh your mind during the day or help you relax at night in preparation for sleep.

Although meditation sounds easy, it takes some practice to be most effective. Perhaps the hardest part is being able to block out intruding thoughts that threaten the peacefulness you seek. But if you practice every day, it will become easier, and you're likely to find that you look forward to these respites from your busy life. You're also likely to discover that sleep comes much more easily to a quiet, relaxed mind.

SELF HYPNOSIS

Hypnosis, a method by which to induce extreme relaxation, can be employed to treat sleep disorders. Some people associate hypnosis with stage acts or television programs they've seen where people who were supposedly hypnotized acted like chickens or did other bizarre things simply because they were told to do them by the hypnotist. This stereotype conveys the impression that hypnosis is about losing control. But actually, it is about gaining control.

A person who is truly hypnotized is in a deep state of relaxation and is fully aware of what is going on around them. For this very reason, self-hypnosis may prove helpful in relieving sleep problems associated with stress. It provides a tool that you can use to induce a deep state of relaxation whenever you want to.

There are many methods of self-hypnosis. Here's one that's fairly easy. Choose a positive statement that expresses a desire. For instance, "Each breath makes me feel more relaxed." Once you have the statement in mind, lie down and take three slow, deep breaths. Close your eyes and, starting at your head, begin using your affirmation statement on different parts of your body. "Each breath makes my forehead more relaxed." As you breathe, imagine releasing any tension in that part of your body when you exhale. Move to the next part: "Each breath makes my jaw more relaxed." Continue using the same affirmative statement with various parts of your body until you finish with your toes.

Continue regular, slow, deep breaths throughout. Then count backward from 100 to 95 and immediately imagine yourself being taken to a serene setting that you would like to visit. It could be indoors or outdoors, as long as it is peaceful and inviting to you. Once there, repeat your affirmation statement three times. Stay and enjoy the place for as long as you like. When you feel ready to leave, say good-bye to your special place. Then, before opening your eyes, tell yourself that you will slowly count from one to three and that by the time you reach three and open your eyes, you will feel fully relaxed and ready to enjoy peaceful sleep.