

# THE EFFORTLESS SLEEP METHOD



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*A Holistic Approach – By Sasha Stephens*

If you suffer from insomnia, you need to understand that a combination of poor sleep habits, negative thoughts and associated behaviour is maintaining your problem and holding it firmly in place. You are doing it to yourself! This means you can solve your sleeping problem yourself, by taking a holistic approach. Not treating sleep itself in isolation, as doctors do with sleeping pills, but rather by attending to *thoughts and beliefs about sleep*, and to *habits and behaviours* which create and reinforce the problem.

The same principles apply to people who suffer from **sleep onset insomnia** (they have difficulty falling asleep) and those who suffer from **sleep maintenance insomnia** (those who fall asleep quickly but wake too early and find it impossible to get back to sleep).

## Can't You Give Me Something to Make Me Sleep?

In the vast majority of cases, insomnia doesn't have a physical cause. This means that going to a medical doctor with a sleeping problem is a little like going to a doctor with a broken heart. When treating insomnia, it is vital to instil a *natural trust in one's own ability to sleep*.

Sleeping pills reduce the amount of *Delta sleep* obtained. The feeling of not having had enough sleep associated with a lack of Delta sleep makes the next day hangover all the more unpleasant. Sleeping medications will leave you with a level of grogginess, thick-headedness, confusion or a spaced-out feeling.

*Sleeping pill hangovers* often seem to associate with a very low mood. Overall, the feeling of a sleeping pill hangover can be worse than the feeling after a sleepless night. Not only is Delta sleep reduced, but many prescription drugs are known to reduce the time spent in REM sleep, which means that they interfere with mental recovery and emotional well-being. Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that sleeping pills often actually *cause* daytime anxiety and depression rather than reduce it.

Far from helping depressed patients, sleeping medication may be more likely to cause depression. In addition, almost all sleeping pills have been shown to be physically addictive which means that *withdrawal symptoms* can be severe.

The use of sleeping pills does not increase your ability to function the next day. On the contrary, those using sleeping pills will, according to most clinical studies, function worse the next day than those who miss a night's sleep. You may be better off *not having had any sleep than having had a full night of drugged sleep*.

*Rebound insomnia* refers to the temporarily worsened insomnia which occurs when a patient attempts to give up a sleeping medication. Many people continue to take sleeping pills, not because they are benefiting in any way, but because they cannot stand the worsened insomnia which kicks in when they try to give it up.

Although sleeping pills may help you to fall asleep, *early waking* occurs because the drugs leave your bloodstream completely after a few hours. The problem is that the body then goes into *instant withdrawal*. The comedown which wakes you up too early and causes anxiousness the next day is the result of this withdrawal and not the effect of the drug still in the bloodstream.

Treating long-term chronic insomnia with hypnotic sleeping pills is somewhat like treating depression with cocaine.

The worst part is that sleeping pills can actually make insomnia worse because the message implicit in the prescribing of a sleeping pill is: *'this pill will make you sleep'*. No one tells you about the inherent danger in taking your own responsibility for falling asleep away. *In giving up responsibility, you give up your power*. If you need a pill to make you sleep, then the implication is that you must be unable to sleep on your own. The result is that you come to trust more and more on the drug and less and less in yourself until, eventually, you have *lost all belief and trust in your own natural ability to sleep*.

### The Philosophy Behind the Effortless Sleep Method

By far the most important thing to restore natural healthy sleep is the *belief* that you could actually sleep. *The unconscious belief in the ability to sleep effortlessly is the safety net that every normal sleeper relies upon and relaxes into every night*. A safety net is just something you trust unconditionally.

## You Will Need to Be Really, Really Honest with Yourself

You need to begin by taking a good look at yourself, your thoughts and your behaviours and eliminate the most common mistakes that insomniacs tend to make.

There is a *mental* and a *behavioural* aspect to chronic insomnia. Most find that the more they worry about sleep, the worse their problem becomes. This is a *mental problem* and it has a *mental solution*. Insomnia is caused by faulty thinking and faulty beliefs, and it can only be changed by attending to those thoughts, not by taking drugs, or using fans, magnets, special pillows, lavender bags or having a special crystal next to your bed.

But insomnia is not a problem that resides *only* in the mind. There are a whole host of contributing *behaviours* which *reinforce* insomnia. These behaviours can be subtle and insidious and make the negative beliefs difficult to change independently.

## What We Focus on Gets Bigger

We tend to focus on what we do not want and what we focus on tends to get bigger. These two psychological principles largely explain why insomnia can persist for such a long time. In a nutshell, insomniacs tend to focus on how *bad* their problem is, thinking and talking about the *worst* nights while completely ignoring and taking for granted the really *good* nights. The more attention you give to insomnia, the worse it becomes.

There are 13 mistakes which people unwittingly make along the road to insomnia. Be honest: how many of these are you guilty of?

## A Recipe for Insomnia: How to Make a Monster In 13 Easy Mistakes

### Mistake I: SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME IN BED

Very often insomnia begins during a period when one is simply spending longer than usual in bed. Students, the self-employed and unemployed all frequently lie until late in the morning and this can be the beginning of the problem. A very common mistake is to lounge around in bed in the morning even when you're not sleeping, creating a mental association of *being in bed with being awake*.

Often when you go to bed the night after a long lie-in, you may not be particularly tired when you lie down, with the result that it takes hours to fall asleep. Spending too long in bed means that your sleep becomes *lighter* and of *poorer quality*. If you feel exhausted even if you have slept for many hours, then there is a good chance that you are spending too long in bed. **If you are spending more time in bed than you did before your insomnia started, then this is almost certainly a key part of your problem.**

There are *three distinct phases of sleep*. A normal sleeper will only spend a few minutes in *Stage 1 sleep* before going into the deeper stages. People with sleep problems often spend a much larger than normal proportion of the night in Stage 1, where they feel as if they are still conscious, and they wake up still feeling exhausted. It is quite possible to spend the entire night in this 'pre-sleep' or 'non-sleep' state. You can go days, weeks even, having *only* this type of sleep. The emotional effect is devastating – the quality of life if you are surviving on this type of sleep is wretched.

In order to feel good in the morning you must spend a reasonable proportion of the night in the third stage – *deep, Delta sleep*. If you sleep for only four hours and those four hours include plenty of Delta sleep, you will feel much better than you will feel after 12 or 13 hours of Stage 1 sleep.

If you spend too much time in bed, you tend to spend a lot more time in Stage 1, and a lot less time in the refreshing Delta sleep. Thus, the **quality** of your sleep suffers. **The longer you spend in bed the less chance you have of getting the deep sleep you need. Shortening the time spent in bed increases the chance of getting the deep sleep you need.**

## **Mistake 2: NAPPING DURING THE DAY**

A daytime nap, on occasion, can be quite delicious, but it can be like playing with fire. Even a 20-minute nap will mean that when you finally get to bed at night, you may not be very sleepy, making it even more difficult to drop off. For all insomniacs, *any napping weakens the connection between bed, night time, and sleep*. So, remember: **A nap in the day lessens the chances of sleeping at night.**

### Mistake 3: LYING IN BED AWAKE

All insomniacs have had the experience of lying awake for hours, fidgeting and becoming more and more frustrated. As you lie there, desperate for sleep, you become tense and anxious. The tension makes it impossible to relax and the bed seems to feel less and less comfortable as you toss and turn. Your bed has now gone from being a sanctuary of peace and escape, to a place of misery and sleepless anxiety. Remember: **Every hour you lie awake in bed weakens the association of bed and sleep. Every hour you lie awake and frustrated reinforces the association of bed with lying in bed and being frustrated.**

### Mistake 4: LYING IN OVER WEEKENDS

For many, the weekends are a great time catch up on some missed sleep. But it is more than likely that much of the time lounging in bed is not actually spent sleeping, weakening the *sleep-bed association*. Also, Sunday night insomnia is simply that having overslept the previous two mornings, when you go to bed at your normal time on Sunday night, you simply are not tired. **Lie-ins are sleep thieves.**

### Mistake 5: READING, USING YOUR LAPTOP, OR WATCHING TV IN BED

When you do anything in bed, you are creating an association between you bed and that thing. This means that whenever you do anything in bed *other* than sleep you are, in effect, weakening your *'falling asleep response'*. **Whatever you do in bed becomes associated with bed.**

### Mistake 6: ASK YOUR DOCTOR FOR SLEEPING PILLS

When you take a pill for insomnia, you make two powerful and negative assumptions: **There is something wrong with me. There is something external that can make me better.**

Many insomniacs prefer to self-medicate using *alcohol*. But alcohol also dehydrates, depresses and can cause you to waken early with a full bladder, an adrenaline rush and a pounding heart as the chemicals leave your bloodstream. Your belief in yourself and consequently your own ability to sleep is diminished every time you take *any* artificial remedy. **Drugs don't work.**

## Mistake 7: TRYING REALLY HARD TO FALL ASLEEP

Good sleepers don't 'try' to do anything, and one thing is certain, if you *try to fall asleep* you will not succeed. Falling asleep is not about *doing* anything. It might be more accurate to describe it as something you do *not* do. **The harder you try to fall asleep, the harder it will be to do so.**

## Mistake 8: OBSESSING ABOUT TIME

Clock-watching and box-ticking can create a horrible obsession with:

- Time spent asleep
- Time spent awake
- Time spent before falling asleep
- Time spent trying to fall asleep
- Time spent waiting to feel sleepy after having got up after being unable to sleep

It really doesn't matter much *how many hours* one spends asleep or waking because not all sleep is the same. All that matters is *how one feels, and how well one functions in the daytime*. **Clock-watching creates an unhealthy obsession with time.**

## Mistake 9: TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM

It cannot be overemphasised how negative an effect talking about your problem can have. You may be one of those who 'bottles it up'. But be warned, all of the following points may still apply to you. It may just be that the only one you speak to about the problem is *yourself*. The following are particularly problematic:

- Calling yourself an insomniac
- Boasting
- Exaggerating

**The more you talk about, boast about, exaggerate, and identify with your problem, the worse it will become! The story you tell about your sleep will come true.**

## Mistake 10: RESEARCHING CURES IN BOOKS, MAGAZINES AND ONLINE

The belief that somewhere, somehow, there is one simple thing that we can take or do which will 'cure' us, combined with the sheer number of remedies out there mean

that our lives often become like a terrible personal laboratory where we become the subject of our own miserable, pointless experiments into sleeping problems. The more desperate we become the more combinations and concoctions we try. **People who are desperate for sleep do not sleep, no matter what they take.** If you are searching for miracle cures you are looking in the wrong place.

### **Mistake 11: TESTING ONE RELAXATION METHOD AFTER ANOTHER**

Most long-term insomniacs have gone through many, many relaxation CDs, mp3s and techniques – *once*. Who knows how many of these things might have worked like magic for you, if only you had stuck with them for a bit? **Anything unfamiliar is likely to disturb sleep for a period of time.**

### **Mistake 12: VISITING INSOMNIA 'SUPPORT' SITES AND FORUMS**

There is one sure way to turn a mild patch of sleeplessness into chronic insomnia – discover the online insomnia community. There are insomniacs like you all over the world, millions of them, all suffering, none with a cure, none with an answer and all of them *constantly reinforcing each other's' problems!* **In general, established insomniacs tend to become irritated by success but identified with failure.** Insomniacs tend to absorb every little bit of negative information about sleep and make it their own. Internet forums are not 'insomnia support sites'. They are 'insomnia reinforcement sites'.

### **Mistake 13: REARRANGING YOUR LIFE AROUND YOUR INSOMNIA**

It doesn't get any worse than this. There is perhaps no piece of behaviour which will accelerate the progress of your problem as much or hold it in place so firmly. Such behaviours may include special routines; avoiding coffee even in the morning, avoiding all alcohol, avoiding scary films or spicy food at night, avoiding holidays or spending nights away from home, never staying out late, avoiding making plans, demanding special behaviours from your spouse or partner, or any other behaviour or special action (and this is the important bit) *intended only for the purpose of helping your sleep.* **When you start rearranging your life for insomnia, insomnia becomes your life.**



## THE CURE

### Just Make a Commitment to Yourself

The Effortless Sleep Method consists of 12 *promises*, 12 commitments, *not* 12 cast-iron rules. Making these promises should not be difficult. Stick to them with energy, with optimism, with dedication and feel *good* about it. *You* are taking control you are taking responsibility to make your life better.

### The First Six Promises: Sleep Hygiene

The first six promises refer to very simple non-drug solutions which are effective in almost all early cases of insomnia. Sleep hygiene is really just a common-sense set of behavioural guidelines which help to restore normal sleeping patterns. **For most, sticking to the first six guidelines will be all that is needed to begin sleeping well again. Whether you've suffered for years, or whether your problem is new, you must make the first six sleep hygiene guidelines part of your life.**

### Preparation – Make Things Easier on Yourself

These are not 'rules' but are small lifestyle changes which many people find make sleep just a little easier.

### Cut Out Stimulants Before Bed

Coffee should be limited to one or two cups in the morning. Don't underestimate the effect of a strong cup of tea. Cola drinks also contain a surprising amount of caffeine.

### Get Some Exercise!

If you find yourself tired all day, but wide awake when it gets to bedtime, this is often because you have not had enough exercise. Going to bed at the end of a long tiring day is one of life's greatest pleasures. If your muscles are tired, then getting into bed and resting can be quite delicious.

### Sort Out Your Environment

Make your **bed and bedroom as comfortable and inviting** as possible. If your mattress is old and lumpy, change it. Buy some new 100% cotton, fresh and crisp bedding.

Don't skimp on lovely feather pillows and duvets. Make sure your bedding is always freshly laundered and smelling nice.

Most people sleep better in a **warm bed in a cool room**. So, turn the heating off and pile up the bed, or use an electric blanket. Wear socks in winter and add an extra duvet. If you don't have air conditioning, try a fan – the 'white noise' it emits is very soothing and can be almost hypnotic.

Most people sleep best in a **very dark room**. Get blackout curtains or try eye shades.

### Chill out!

Set aside time for relaxation or meditation, even if it is only 15 minutes a day. You may be amazed by the effect that this can have on your life in general.

A *hot* bath or shower one hour before bed can be extremely helpful. As the body cools down, sleepiness sets in, reaching a peak one hour after the bath.

## The 12 Promises

### Promise 1: SPEND LESS IN BED

When you get into bed at night, it is vital that you are actually sleepy. No matter how late it is, do *not* go to bed unless you are tired. Next, you need to discover that *specific number of hours of sleep that ensures you will be really tired when you go to bed*. You *also* need to feel good all day, function well, and not be overwhelmed by the desire for a nap in the afternoon.

The ideal time seems to be between six and seven and a half hours for most people. What we are trying to do here is *find the amount the sleep which will enable you feel good all day, yet still means that when it comes to bedtime you are really tired and ready for sleep*.

You will need to experiment to find *your ideal time to spend in bed*. A good rule is to start with the amount which seems right to you, *minus half an hour*. If you don't see an improvement in your sleep within a week, cut the time spent in bed by another half an hour.

If you see an improvement in the time taken to fall asleep, but find yourself unbearably sleepy during the day, *increase the time by half an hour*. The point is to *be tired and sleepy when you go to bed*. **90% of all insomniacs can be cured by simply spending less time in bed.**

### Promise 2: NO NAPS

From now on, *avoid napping in the day at all costs*. If napping in the day is the only decent sleep you get, it will undoubtedly be at the expense of a proper full night's sleep. **Sacrifice the nap, not the night.**

### Promise 3: GET UP AND DO SOMETHING WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP

So, what do you do when sleep just doesn't come? Well, the one thing you shouldn't do is to *continue to lie there, not sleeping*. If you can't sleep, you should *get out of bed*. If you are not asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, you should get out of bed and *do something boring* until you feel ready to fall asleep.

Do something like reading the phone book. *Any change in focus* is usually enough, whether it's having a hot bath or shower, doing some housework like ironing, cleaning out the fridge, or doing a crossword or Sudoku. But what is very important is that you have worked out what you will do *before* you lie down to sleep.

Have a jigsaw puzzle ready on the table, have in mind to clean the skirting boards, or a particular bit of studying to do. Perhaps have a bit of creative writing in mind. As long as the activity is *not extremely stimulating*, it is not very important what it is. Do fill those night-time waking hours with *meaningful activity* and feel the satisfaction of having got so much more done.

Whatever you decide to do, it should be a job which *can be finished in between 30 minutes or an hour*. But don't get too focused on the clock. The idea is that your focus is taken away from clock-watching, away from the fact that you are not asleep. Your focus is on *the activity*, not on whether it has been 30 minutes since you got up. It needs to be just long enough so that when you get back into bed, it feels relaxing and fresh, and you can start the 'falling asleep' process all over again. **If you are in bed you should be asleep. If not, get up.**

#### Promise 4: GET UP AT THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY

This simple and seemingly unimportant little promise can have the most incredible effect on sleeping patterns. When this promise is combined with promise 1, 'spend less time in bed', the two create a powerful foundation for all other sleep promises. **Good sleep loves routine. Keep to yours and good sleep will become a habit.**

#### Promise 5: DO NOTHING IN BED BUT SLEEP OR MAKE LOVE

The main reason for all sleep hygiene rules is to create such a *strong connection between bed and sleep* that just the act of getting into bed and lying down triggers the falling asleep process. If you keep your promises, your bed will go from being a place of tension and misery to a sanctuary of peace, your own special little place in which you can curl up at the end of the day.

So why is sex ok? Unlike other activities, sex is unique in that it is a relaxing, de-stressing activity which often happens in bed, just before falling asleep. Thus, it already has an inbuilt association with sleep. **Bed = sleep or sex.**

#### Promise 6: REDUCE OR ELIMINATE THE PILLS

You *must* get proper medical advice before starting any drug withdrawal programme. Speak to your doctor about reducing your dosage. As your recovery progresses, you will quickly reap the benefits of this promise. To start with, there is a good chance that your insomnia will *worsen for a time*. But do your best to see it through. Sooner or later, you *will* begin to sleep again.

If you are regularly self-medicating with alcohol, you will need to take steps to reduce your consumption with a view to giving up altogether. The rule is that you not use alcohol *in order to help you sleep*.

The Effortless Sleep Method aims to strengthen your *belief in yourself*, rediscovering your *inborn ability to sleep* naturally and unaided. **Every night you sleep with reduced medication is a step on the road to recovery.**

## The Second Six Promises: Changing Negative Beliefs You May Have About Sleep

### Promise 7: STOP CLOCK-WATCHING

From now on, pay *no attention to the number of hours of sleep* you get. Work out how many hours you need, set your getting up time and from then on, *forget about time*. Do not have clock in your room which can easily be seen. From now on, you should have *no idea* how many hours you slept last night, or how long it took you to fall asleep. All that matters is *how well you feel during the day*. **It's quality of sleep, not quantity that counts.**

### Promise 8: REPLACE NEGATIVE SLEEP TALK WITH POSITIVE STATEMENTS

#### No Negative Sleep-Talk

From now on, avoid saying '*I'm a terrible sleeper*', '*I'm an insomniac*', '*I'm so tired today*', '*I wish I had slept last night*', and instead begin to look for positive things to say about your sleep. It will sound like a lie to begin with so start small, congratulating yourself for small wins – '*I slept pretty well last night*'. Celebrate your progress. Make a point of telling someone '*I had such a good sleep last night*', '*I slept like a log last night*'.

#### Use Affirmations

The truth is, we are all constantly using affirmations that reinforce our beliefs. The unfortunate truth is that these are usually *negative*. Positive affirmations are very powerful and if used properly will really change your beliefs about sleep.

#### Write It Down

Buy a nice A4 lined pad and use a pen. Now, every day you will write out, in neat handwriting, one of the following affirmations:

*I am a brilliant sleeper.*

*My brain knows how to fall asleep naturally.*

*I am amazed at how well I sleep.*

*I can sleep anywhere, any time.*

*I really enjoy going to sleep at night.*  
*I love sleeping.*  
*I can sleep better than anyone I know.*

Fill the whole page with one repeated affirmation, and as you write, think about the meaning of the words. Don't rush. Write with care and feeling. You can say these words as you write. Think about what the words mean and allow thoughts and pictures to come into your head which fit them. When the page is full it should look neat and attractive, like a work of art, or a poem. It will give you a pleasing psychological boost to see the finished page. **Start writing your own story, and it will come true.**

### **Promise 9: LET GO OF THE SEARCH FOR AN INSTANT MIRACLE CURE**

If you are a long-term insomniac, this might just be the hardest, and the most important promise of all. Just keep on believing that at some point in the future, be it a week, a month or a year, *you can be sleeping naturally, effortlessly, like a baby.*

The fact is: you are now on the road to recovery. If this is true, what does it matter how long that road is? As long as you stick to the Method, you *will* get better. One morning you will wake up surprised that you have slept so well. And the realisation that you are genuinely, indisputably regaining your *natural ability to sleep* is worth all the money you could ever spend on nonsense cures. **All you need to cure yourself is within you.**

### **Promise 10: DISCOVER A RELAXATION TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS FOR YOU**

If your busy, active mind is stopping you from sleeping, it is important to have some way of switching off the obsessive thinking and worrying which can keep you awake. Remember, a new technique will only work *once it has become established as a part of your bedtime routine.*

So, pick a relaxation technique or a relaxation CD that appeals to you and commit to using it every night until it ceases to feel new. Do not reject something until you have used it nightly for *at least* a fortnight. **Relaxation techniques and recordings will usually only work once they have become familiar.**

## Promise 11: DECIDE ON YOUR OWN SAFETY THOUGHT

### The Best Ever 'Crutch'

The problem with crutches is that eventually they are liable to let you down. Because they are external things, they really have nothing intrinsic to do with helping you sleep. What they give you is a safety net, something to believe in, something you can trust when you feel anxious.

Try to find a comforting and encouraging *fact* about your sleep – not wishful thinking, a *fact*. Pick whatever positive fact you feel would be most likely to give you hope during the stress of the day and in the dark lonely nights in bed. Some examples are:

*I slept through anxiety like this before and I can do it again.*

*I slept before on a high-pressure night so I can do it again.*

*It really doesn't matter whether I sleep or not.*

*I can sleep no what matter what.*

*Tonight might be the beginning of a good stretch.*

*I have stuck to the programme, I am getting better.*

**Your safety thought will support you as you fall.**

## Promise 12: PUT YOUR LIFE BEFORE YOUR INSOMNIA

Let's get one thing clear: You won't get over your insomnia until you stop making compromises for it. Don't waste another day waiting for your life to start. At some point, you have to take the plunge, you have to start saying 'yes' to invitations, you have to start making plans, you have to start doing all those things you have been avoiding because of insomnia. *Life is now – start living.*

From now on, keep religiously to the promises you have made. But in all other ways, you should act exactly as you would do if you had never had a problem with insomnia. *You are now in control of your life, you get to decide exactly how to spend your time, not your insomnia!* From now on, you will do *exactly as you please* and to *hell* with your insomnia! **From now on, your life comes first, not your insomnia.**

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