

USC Center for Work & Family Life

Quick Strategies to Falling Asleep

◆ **Read something**

Reading a book can help you fall asleep. The key is not to stimulate your mind so try to read text that can lull you to sleep. It is best to read a hard cover book and stay away from reading on electronics.

◆ **Count backwards from 100**

Combine this with breathing techniques. Count backwards with deep breathing. Begin at 100, breathe in deeply for each number, starting over each time you lose count. Don't rush your inhales and exhales, breathe in feeling the air flow through your nose, chest, and down to your stomach. Exhale slowly, in a calm and relaxed pace.

◆ **Use the alphabet**

List-making game that makes your mind wander. Playing counting or listing games can distract your mind from overthinking, and tire it to sleep. Begin this game by thinking of a category (eg. countries) and think of an item in that category for each letter beginning with A, B, C, (eg. Australia, Brazil, etc). If you haven't fallen asleep by the end of the alphabet, simply repeat with a different topic. To start you off, try categories such as "Brands," "Foods," or "Animals."

◆ **Make yourself sleepy**

Exercise to help your body remember how drowsiness feels. Try to remember what being drowsy feels like. Think back to a time you were very sleepy; maybe the last time you stayed up all night writing a paper, or wanted to hit the snooze button. Remember how good lying in bed felt, the tiredness of your body, the heaviness of your eyelids. Clear your mind and only imagine how worn out each muscle is, and how much you want to close your eyes. You can combine this strategy with deep breathing or progressive relaxation.

◆ **Replay**

Exercise positive recounting events of your day or your favorite movie to lull your mind to exhaustion. Go through all the positive events that happen in your day, such as things that you are grateful for, good things that happen, the food you ate, the outfit you picked out for the day. Replay each individual thing you did and accomplished today, beginning with waking up, getting out of bed, making breakfast, etc. Remember details such as what foods you ate for breakfast, who you spoke to, what you spoke about, and try to experience each event again from your own perspective. You can also do this for your favorite show or movie you watched recently, something that you can still remember well enough to recall each event happening in chronological order. Try to remember details about the actors and setting, what they were wearing, what they were saying. Visualize each scene in your mind and play it out again as if you are re-watching it.

◆ **Progressive Relaxation**

Destressing technique used for insomnia, relaxes your muscles one by one. This technique helps calm your body and mind into a relaxed state open to sleep. Begin by finding a comfortable position. Now start from your feet and work your way up to your head. First, tighten and clench your toes and count slowly to eight (try deep breathing while you count just as in the "Count Backwards" strategy) and then let go and relax. Now tighten your feet, count slowly to eight, and relax. Repeat for your calves, knees,

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and keep repeating this muscle by muscle up to your neck. After you've completely relaxed all the parts of your body, let yourself sink into this feeling of deep relaxation and comfort.

◆ **Let go of your body**

Two methods of body relaxation. These two methods are similar to "Progressive Relaxation" in that they help relax your body, but go one step further using your imagination to feel different sensations.

1. Melting into the bed - Often right after waking up, or right before falling asleep, you might notice that you can't actively feel some parts of your body (eg. your toes, your forearms, your knees, etc) unless you move. Try "numbing" your body part by part, concentrating on letting go of the physical feeling starting with the center of your body, and feeling it slowly becoming one with the bed. Feel each body part relaxing and becoming heavier, sinking deeper and deeper into the bed.
2. Floating - Opposite of the previous exercise, try to combine breathing exercises with imagining the feeling of floating. Shake out all the tension in your body, and lie in a comfortable position. Begin by breathing deeply into your stomach, and imagining a light, relaxing setting. Exhale slowly and begin to imagine each part of your body getting lighter and lighter. Which each inhale, you feel your core beginning to rise above the bed. Continue to imagine your body floating higher, and finding a state of comfort.

◆ **Write it down**

Method to let go of racing thoughts and a mind circling around worries. If you're having racing thoughts and anxiety, try writing positive things down. Focus on the great things that happen in the day, the things you are grateful for, the people that you love and the things you love about them, and places that you travel to. This will help take the pressure off your thoughts.

◆ **Zooming out**

Method to quiet racing thoughts and tension. Another way to conquer overthinking, is to actually quiet the voice in your head. When we think to ourselves, we actually hear our own voice saying each thought aloud in our mind. Try thinking "I need to buy bread." Did you notice that you can actually "hear" a voice saying that sentence out loud. Now notice how the voice is speaking. Is the voice loud. Is the tone anxious. Try "saying" these sentences in different tones (happy, sad, funny). The key is to quiet down this voice, so try thinking in a monotonous, quiet, tired tone. Keep thinking all your thoughts in this voice, and hear the voice getting quieter and quieter, moving further away.

◆ **Releasing worries**

Method to quiet worried mind. Instead of thinking of worries in a negative tone, such as "I don't have enough time," or "I don't want to fail the exam." Change these thoughts into positive requests, such as "I want to accomplish as many tasks as possible tomorrow," and "I want to remember everything I've studied." Thinking in a positive manner can help ease the tension in your mind and encourage you to rest.

◆ **Mind imagery**

Exercise that takes advantage of random images that slip into mind when tired. Often when we are tired or close our eyes, we can see imagery such as colors, lights, speckles, and even objects that don't make much sense. We have conscious thoughts such as worries; we push these out of the way to focus on concrete images. However, concentrating on these images can actually lull you to sleep. Try and embrace whatever slips into mind. It could be anything from the colorful specks inside your eyelids, to a random memory of your neighbor's cat. Instead of thinking about concrete memories and thoughts, let your mind wander and see what these images do on their own. This can often lead to dreams as the images become more vivid and real while you fall deeper into sleep.

◆ **Create a story**

Induce images to slip into mind by setting up a scene and story. This expands on the "Mind Imagery" strategy to take advantage of images that come to mind and create a story out of them. You can start by imagining the setting, location, and time. Then think of a main character; it could be you or maybe the first thing that comes to mind (eg. neighbor's cat). Now just let the character interact in its environment as you imagine it would. Relax and let your mind wander. There is no pressure to come up with a good story, or even one that makes sense! This may eventually become part of your dreams as well.