

Breaking Free of Anxiety, Part IX, Sleeping Well

By Vic Rebman Ph.D.

A common symptom of anxiety is difficulty sleeping. Most anxiety sufferers experience sleep onset insomnia--a difficulty in falling asleep. The average time for most adults to fall asleep is about 20 minutes. Anxiety sufferers can lay awake for an hour or more. Others may fall asleep, but awaken in the middle of the night and begin to turn thoughts over and over. Then unable to fall back asleep.

Why do the anxious have a more difficult time sleeping? It is mostly due to worry and rumination (see Part V of this series). Rumination and worry disrupt sleep patterns because the mental patterns actually increase physiological arousal, which is incompatible with sleep. As one worries, the arousal increases, making it more and more difficult to fall asleep.

Because anxiety sufferers are more prone to worry and rumination, it easily becomes associated with sleep and bedtime. As a result, it becomes more and more difficult to fall asleep. This worry about the inability to fall asleep becomes a vicious cycle and can turn into chronic insomnia. This is why one key to sleeping well is to break free of rumination and worry. Another important skill is to learn to problem-solve effectively, using your time throughout the day, so it does not become associated with bedtime. Bedtime is not problem-solving time. Let your mind go of problems and issues in the final few hours of the day...this will help you sleep well.

Research indicates individuals who sleep well unclutter their mind when they retire at night. They generally think about nothing of relevance, allowing their mind to drift off. Relaxation and quieting the mind is a skill which can be learned and developed. These skills are taught in my Sleep Well! program...and found to help 100% of individuals improve their sleep (based on Harvard sleep studies). In addition, 90% of those in the studies, reduced or eliminated the need for sleep medication. In Sleep Well! I integrate the tools and techniques taught in the Harvard Medical School sleep studies with self-hypnosis, to make the skills even more powerful for learning how to fall asleep and sleep through the night.

One last tip: Avoid alcohol in the hours leading up to bedtime. While it can have a sedative effect, and even help you fall asleep, it leads to midnight awakenings! This is a sure way to create "middle insomnia." These problems can be avoided by avoiding alcohol at least three hours before retiring.

To review the Sleep Well! program, just check it out on this website, or give me a call for information.