Tips for Sleeping for Survivors of Trauma and Loss

Have a Bedtime Routine

- Start relaxing an hour before bedtime.
- Take a bath or shower.
- Read or watch relaxing TV.
- Repeat your bedtime routine every day in the same order before bed.

A consistent bedtime routine signals to your body that you are "winding down" and ready for sleep.

Comfy and Dark Sleeping Space

- Keep bedroom dark.
- Keep temperature cool so body doesn't feel too warm to sleep.
- Sleep under a cozy blanket.

Studies suggest we sleep best when we are a little cool but under a blanket.

Limit Stimulating Substances

- Caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol can make it hard to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid smoking close to bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol before bedtime.

While some report that alcohol helps them fall asleep, it later acts as a stimulant that wakes you up during the night – these awakenings will interfere with restful sleep.

Avoid Late Meals

- Plan to eat your dinner and evening snack a few hours before bedtime.
- If you are still hungry right before bed, have something simple.
- Drink water regularly throughout the day so you won't be as thirsty at bedtime.
- Limit water at bedtime.

Don't Stress

- If you have trouble falling asleep, try not to be too hard on yourself.
- Avoid checking the clock.
- If you can't sleep after 20 minutes or so, get up and relax by reading or watching TV until you feel tired. Then return to bed.

Frustration and stress may release stress hormones that interfere with the ability to drift off to sleep.

Bedside Notebook

- Keep a pen and paper by your bed in case you start making mental "to do" lists while trying to fall asleep.

Writing it down will ensure you remember, but it also allows you to "let it go" while you are in bed.

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Peaceful Thoughts

- Use your senses to focus on the current moment: what do you hear, what does your body feel like on the bed, what can you smell?
- If you are struggling with loss and missing someone, try repeating a peaceful mantra such as: "They are at peace, let me know a sense of peace."
- At night, if you "catch" yourself replaying your tragedy, try to identify what or whom you are grateful for.

Many survivors who are on their journey to healing report that finding simple things in their life to be grateful for can refocus painful dwelling on negative events and loss.

Controlled Breathing

- Take slow, deep breaths into your belly.
- Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Breathe out through your mouth for 5 seconds.
- Slowly count backwards from 10 as you are breathing.

Beds are for Sleeping

- Use your bed for sleeping only.
- Eat, work, and watch TV in other spaces.

Allow your brain to register that when you are in bed, you are there just to relax and sleep

Avoid Naps

- If you feel like you must nap, keep it short (about 20 minutes).
- Try not to nap after 3:00 P.M.

While your body and mind may feel exhausted, naps can interfere with your nighttime sleep. This is part of setting your internal clock.

Exercise Earlier in the Day

- Exercising regularly can help improve sleep, but exercising right before bed can keep you awake.

When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals that need time to be processed. This can make it hard to fall asleep if you exercise too close to bedtime

Get Moving in the Morning

- Do your best to get out of bed as soon as you wake up.
- Allow natural light to come into your room.
- Try not to overthink your day. Focus on one simple task at a time: brush teeth, have breakfast, get dressed, and so on.

Some days it may be hard to get out of bed but doing so will help to set your internal clock so you sleep well the next night

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1744 Payne Avenue, Cleveland OH 44114   Phone (216) 623-6555