**Worry & Sleep**

**Worrying in Bed – How to Reduce it**

Some people report that they spend a lot of time worrying about their sleeping difficulties. They say that they worry about not being able to sleep, about what might happen if they don’t get enough sleep and about how they will cope the next day if they are tired and grumpy. Worrying is an example of the unhelpful thinking patterns that we talked about earlier. Thought records can be really helpful in challenging these unhelpful thoughts about sleep (for a reminder have a look at the section on thinking patterns).

While you are working on your thought records, there are a number of other strategies that can be helpful in reducing worrying. The idea is to try a number of the strategies described below and see which ones work best for you.

* Some of the worries you have are quite understandable. While it’s OK to spend some time thinking about them, it is not a good idea to do this in bed! When we spend a lot of our time in bed worrying rather than sleeping, we start to associate being in bed with feeling worried and stressed (which revs up our system) rather than feeling sleepy and relaxed. Perhaps you could try setting aside some time during the day to purposely think about some of the things that are worrying you. Writing your worries down can be helpful, as can brainstorming different ways to deal with them - try to come up with some alternative solutions to your problems. If you find yourself starting to worry while lying in bed, try saying to yourself “Stop, I thought about this earlier today, and I can think about it tomorrow. Right now it’s time to go to sleep”.
* You are more likely to have trouble getting to sleep if you lie in bed worrying about not sleeping. What is the worst thing that could happen if you don’t sleep tonight? You will not die from lack of sleep. You will not go crazy from not sleeping tonight. You will be a bit tired tomorrow, however, just like you might have been in the past when you stayed up late for a party or had to care for a sick child throughout the night. You will make it through the day even though you are feeling tired. Worrying about this will not change it. Try telling yourself that “It’s ok if I don’t sleep, I’ll just lie here and have a peaceful rest. Resting is good for me too (and it’s certainly better than worrying!)”
* Remember that it is normal to wake a few times during the night. Don’t stress yourself out by lying in bed worrying about how often you wake up or how hard it will be to go back to sleep. If you rev yourself up by worrying about how hard it will be to go back to sleep we guarantee it will be difficult to go back to sleep!
* Try using breathing exercises or relaxation to help you avoid worrying in bed. If you are having trouble getting back to sleep and can feel yourself starting to worry, relaxation exercises can help block these worrying thoughts and can also help to calm your body and mind.
* Try thinking about something pleasant and enjoyable as a way of stopping yourself from worrying about stressful situations. Some people like to remember something pleasant they have seen or done, or to imagine a situation that they would like to experience. Some people find it helpful to do breathing exercises while imagining a pleasant scene - this helps both the body and the mind to relax.
* Try having a tape of your favourite relaxation music (i.e., waves breaking on the shore or rainforest sounds) in a CD/tape-player next to your bed. Some people find it helpful to listen to these relaxing sounds while falling asleep.
* When we lie in bed desperately trying to go to sleep, we usually find it more difficult to relax and drop off to sleep. Trying too hard can actually make it more difficult. Try letting go of your conscious mind and just relaxing. Some people find it helpful to tell themselves things like “Today is finished, it’s time to switch off, let go. There is nothing to do or think about until tomorrow …tomorrow is another day. Just rest…”
* Some people find that they tend to avoid thinking about things during the day (i.e., traumatic or distressing things that have happened in the past) and so are overwhelmed with worries at night. As we suggested before, sometimes it can be helpful to purposely set aside time to think about these things during the day (i.e., to try to work through the problem). Other times, especially when the problem is very distressing, it can be a good idea to get some professional help. Talking through your problems can help reduce worrying, which can make it easier for you to get a good night’s sleep.