

Lesson 5

Embracing Mindfulness for Restful Sleep

Introduction

Mindfulness is about being aware, moment-by-moment and accepting without judgement, any bodily sensations, feelings, or thoughts.

When sleep eludes you because of one reason or another, doing a mindfulness exercise can really help.

Mindfulness can help focus you on the here and now and so helps put things into perspective about the past and the future.

Thoughts are simply mental processes. They do not mean that the situation or threat is happening now. Worrying or thinking at bedtime is not usually helpful.

Practising mindfulness at bedtime offers another solution to help you sleep.

The science

Research shows that when you are being mindful, the act of concentrating on the present moment relieves you from dwelling on the past or fretting about the future.

Unlike other approaches, whilst mindfulness can be relaxing, it is not the same as relaxation techniques.

The aim of mindfulness is to focus your attention, accept any passing thoughts, and accept your emotions and physical sensations. With relaxation strategies, the aim is to change your current state.

Studies on mindfulness indicate that it helps fight insomnia or waking early from sleep. It can also calm your overactive mind and help you fall asleep and stay asleep for longer.

Why this helps

Being aware of the present moment is good for sleep. It helps stop racing thoughts in their tracks.

By acknowledging thoughts are there, you are taking away their powerful hold over you. It can help to say 'thinking' as a thought occurs without engaging with it, before gently pulling your attention back to the body or breath.

No matter how many times a thought pops into your mind when doing mindfulness, bring your attention back to your body or breath, as they will anchor you to the present.

Exercise

For this exercise, you will need 5 minutes.

Video

Body Scan

As you are lying in bed, direct your attention to the soles of your feet, noticing all the physical sensations, any tingling or warmth. If any thoughts cross your mind, just acknowledge they are there before redirecting your attention to that part of the body.

Up to the knees, imagine scanning over the top of the knees and behind your knees, noticing how they feel, without trying to change that. Then your hips, back, stomach, chest, neck, and finally head.

This body scan helps you simply check in with yourself, and allows you to notice and accept any sensations, thoughts or feelings. It is also quite relaxing.

Now, if you are feeling sleepy, just let yourself go and allow yourself to drift off gently into the night.

Wrap

Focussing on a mindful exercise such as the Body Scan can help keep you in the moment rather than trapped with a past worry or anticipating a future worrying event.

What next?

For another useful tip on getting your forty winks, check in with our last lesson, when we share strategies on helping you keep asleep.