

BETTER SLEEP

SESSION 4 COURSE WORKBOOK



Session Four

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE 'RACING MIND'

Almost everyone recognises the description of a 'racing mind' – the way our mind seems to speed up almost as soon as we turn the light off. And the harder we try to 'switch it off' the faster it goes and the wilder it gets . . .

Often this can be because we haven't allowed ourselves 'thinking time' during the day and it is only when we finally get into bed that we have some free space to think about all the things we haven't had time to think about during the day. For others, however, it may be that our minds are constantly active during the day as well. Whichever, thinking certainly makes it difficult to sleep!



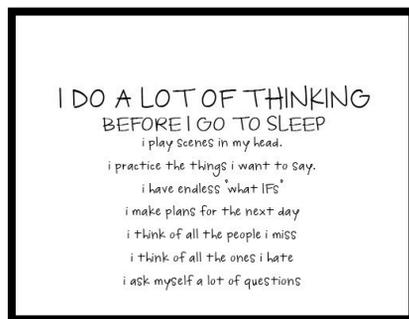
As has already been said, we are not able to consciously control when we fall asleep – we will fall asleep when we are tired enough and when our brainwaves become sufficiently slow. Unfortunately, thinking, especially the kind of thinking we tend to do when we are in bed, keeps our brains stimulated – and us awake!

Common types of thoughts that keep us awake:

- Rehearsing and Planning Thoughts: thinking back over our day or looking ahead to the future.
- Problem-solving Thoughts: things that need to be done and we don't know how to go about sorting them out – this can be hard work!
- Thoughts about our Health: if we have been unwell it is natural to worry about this.
- Thoughts about Sleeping (or not sleeping): if we haven't been sleeping well we are likely to worry about this and how we will cope tomorrow.
- Thoughts about our Bodies: we may become very aware of our heartbeat, or feeling hot/cold, or an itch, or muscle tension. This can make us very restless.

- Thoughts about Thinking: being aware that our thoughts are buzzing round and that this will stop us sleeping – can stop us sleeping!
- Thoughts about Noises: we can begin to focus in on any unfamiliar noise and wonder what it is, and then we may begin to feel uneasy.

All of these different types of thoughts can keep us awake – either because they are hard work and keep our minds active and alert, or because they are distressing and increase our feelings of anxiety and unease, or because they can make us feel frustrated that we are still awake – and frustration can lead to feelings of annoyance and anger. If we are anxious, unhappy, fearful or annoyed we are unlikely to fall asleep, because these emotions keep us in a state of wakefulness. Remember, **we can never make ourselves fall asleep**, no matter how hard we try, but we will fall asleep when the conditions are right, and our minds are calm and untroubled.



So, what techniques can we use to control our thoughts?

We can:

- 1) **Challenge unhelpful thoughts.** Sometimes we can challenge unhelpful thoughts and substitute unhelpful thoughts with more helpful, less worrying thoughts.

Remember in Session 1 we considered how we could challenge unhelpful thoughts about sleep, such as 'I will get sick if I don't sleep' or 'I won't cope well tomorrow',

and perhaps replace these with more helpful thoughts such as 'Insomnia does not cause illness' and 'I have coped ok in the past with relatively little sleep'.

2) Use Relaxation and Imagery. The relaxation exercise that you have been practising can be a good way of focussing your mind away from intrusive and worrying thoughts. You can now add on a soothing imagery exercise after you have completed the relaxation exercise.

This involves creating a kind of picture story in your mind. This story should be:

- vivid and clear in your mind's eye
- pleasant and enjoyable
- relaxing, avoiding strong emotions
- planned in advance
- practised regularly till you are good at it



The image you choose should be a place you find relaxing, such as somewhere you have been on holiday or a favourite walk. Once you have chosen, take yourself to the place in your mind's eye, visualizing it in as much detail as you can manage. Think about everything you can see, hear, smell, feel and touch.

For example, if your chosen place is a tropical beach, then you can try to imagine yourself walking down onto the beach, feeling the hot sand beneath your feet, the warm sun on your shoulders and perhaps a breeze playing gently with your hair. Visualize the deep green blue of the sea and the silvery sand and listen to the waves gently lapping the shoreline and perhaps a sea-bird or two calling in the distance. Perhaps you can smell the faint tang of salt in the air as you climb into your gently swaying hammock and hear the palm fronds rustling high above you. Imagine the soft comfort of the hammock as it cradles your body and the sensation as it moves slightly in the breeze. The sky above is deepest blue, not a cloud in sight, and now you can smell the faintly coconut smell of your sun cream as you smooth it onto your skin, and perhaps someone is handing you an ice-cold pina colada . . . and so on.

Going over every tiny detail in this way can be enough to stop distracting, unhelpful thoughts flitting into your mind . . . and help you to nod off.

3) Use Sleep Scheduling. Some of the strict rules of sleep scheduling can be very helpful in dealing with these thoughts and worries that can keep us awake.

- Staying up till we are 'sleepy tired' means we are more likely to fall asleep quickly before our minds can get going.
- Getting out of bed if we are not asleep within 15 or 20 minutes means that we have less thinking time in bed.
- If we stick to the sleep scheduling programme, we will remove the thoughts and emotions which tend to occur during the night into another part of the house, which means our bed will become a more restful place.

4) Put the Day to Rest. This is particularly useful for dealing with those thoughts about what has happened today, or what we might have to deal with tomorrow. If we can sort this all out long before we go to bed then we don't have to do it again once we are in bed – we can go to sleep instead!

- Set aside 20 minutes to half an hour in the early part of the evening – perhaps after your evening meal.
- Sit down with a pen and some paper.
- Think about what happened during the day, how things went and how you feel about them.
- Write out a 'to-do' list – with big tasks broken down into small steps.
- At the end of your 20 minutes you should feel in more control of your problems.
- At bed-time should anything you have considered pop into your head, remind yourself that you have already dealt with it earlier on.
- If new things crop up at bed-time, jot them down on a piece of paper and deal with them the following day.



- 5) **Use Thought-blocking.** This is a simple way to deal with those trivial, unimportant thoughts that can crowd into our minds. We may often experience these in bed, especially if we wake during the night. It is best to start the thought-blocking process immediately before we are too wide awake.



- Simply repeat the word 'the', every 2 seconds in your head, with your eyes closed.
- Don't say it out loud, but you might find it helpful to 'mouth' it.
- Keep going for around 5 minutes or so.

This technique works by stopping other thoughts from getting in. The word 'the' is meaningless by itself, and it will come to mean even less the more often you repeat it! The point is that it does not have any emotional effect on you – though it might bore you to sleep!

- 6) **Use Paradoxical Intention.** This is a fancy way of saying 'give up trying'. At the risk of becoming boring, I will remind you that: **the more we try to sleep, the less likely we are to sleep.** If we turn this round and actually try to stay awake then, paradoxically, we are more likely to fall asleep. It works by taking the pressure off us.

If you ask a 'good sleeper' how he/she falls asleep so quickly, they will tell you it is easy – it just happens! You can get back to being like that with time and patience.

This is how to use paradoxical intention:

- Make yourself comfortable in bed, turn the light off, but keep your eyes open.
- Do not make any effort to fall asleep.
- Do not worry about being awake.

- ❑ Tell yourself that you are not bothered about being awake, and that, in fact, you are going to see how long you can stay awake for.
- ❑ Do not, however, force yourself to stay awake, but when your eye-lids feel as though they want to close, say to yourself 'I'll not shut my eyes yet. I'll see if I can stay awake for a bit longer.'

Following these steps can stop you feeling anxious that you are not asleep yet. If you are tired – and you are likely to be if you are following the sleep schedule process – sleep will come naturally.

When you wake in the morning you will feel good that you fell asleep without trying – and this is likely to boost your confidence, as this will be evidence that your natural sleep drive is beginning to return.



HOME PRACTICE: Remember to keep using your sleep diary!

SLEEP DIARY

	TIME SLEEPING					TIME IN BED		
	Time Fell Asleep	Time Woke Up	A Hours/Minutes Between Times	B Minutes Awake in Night	A Minus B (Hrs/min)	Time Went to Bed	Time Got Up	Hours/ Minutes
DAY 1								
DAY 2								
DAY 3								
DAY 4								
DAY 5								
DAY 6								
DAY 7								
Total weekly sleeping time:						Total weekly time in bed:		
Total weekly sleeping time ÷ 7 = Average time asleep:						Total weekly time in bed ÷ 7 = Average time in bed:		
Average time asleep ÷ Average time in bed x 100 = Sleep Efficiency:								

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