Falling Asleep with Anxiety

At the end of the day, many people have trouble turning off their minds. All the things they were too busy to think about during the day (i.e. relationships, money, work) seem to hang over them and cause their mind to race. When this begins to happen repeatedly, it can become a vicious cycle of anxiety and sleeplessness. Experts note that there is a significant overlap between symptoms of insomnia, anxiety and other mood disorders.

How anxiety affects your sleep

Anyone can develop anxiety-related sleep problems which can make it difficult to fall asleep and cause frequent or early waking with an inability to fall back asleep. Sleep problems caused by anxiety aren't limited to people diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Experts say people with persistent insomnia also become anxious about their sleep. The more anxious they become, the greater the possibility of poor sleep and insomnia.

The good news is that if you have one problem, you can help the other at the same time. For example, if you have an anxiety disorder, then getting treatment with certain therapies, meditation techniques and/or medications can indirectly improve sleep.

Improve sleep and reduce anxiety on your own

Practice relaxation techniques
Many approaches, such as progressive relaxation, mindfulness exercises, meditation or yoga, can combat anxiety. Begin by trying these new skills earlier in the day so you don't put too much pressure on yourself before bedtime. Then, once you're comfortable with it, you can do it later in the day.

Get into a regular sleep routine
This involves a routine to wind down before bed with a set bedtime and waking time to align with the body's internal circadian clock.

Schedule some idle time before bed
Prior to beginning your bedtime routine, it may be helpful to jot down anything you need to remember for the next day. Address things like paying bills, work tasks or relationship issues at least a couple of hours before bedtime.

Cut down on screen time

It is tempting to watch TV, text or use a computer right up until the time you try to go to sleep. However, research has shown that the blue light in most electronic screens has the most potential to influence and delay the body's natural circadian rhythms, making it harder to fall asleep.

Limit alcohol and caffeine

People tend to think that drinking alcohol helps you fall asleep, but it can actually lead to lighter and more disrupted sleep. Caffeine can also stay in your system for several hours, so it's smart to avoid it later in the day if you're having trouble going to sleep.

Create a calming bedroom environment

Your bedroom environment should promote good sleep hygiene. Make it a cozy place with colors that elicit calm and keep it dark and quiet. You can also try to use white noise to encourage sleep.

If you still have persistent sleep problems caused by anxiety, talk to your doctor or a behavioral health professional about treatment options.

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