



SLEEP

After surviving trauma, your brain may emulate a small child hyped up on a candy binge, except instead of sugar, it's overloaded with epinephrine and adrenaline. While sleep issues after a traumatic experience can be distressing, they may also be an important opportunity for treating and healing from trauma. Research suggests that getting adequate sleep after a traumatic event can reduce intrusive trauma-related memories and make them less distressing. In fact, you need **MORE** sleep than normal to reset and rebalance the brain and body after a traumatic event.

According to scientists, sleep is a vitally important part of the healing process for multiple reasons.

- Reenergizes your body's cells. Yay, energy!
- Clears waste from the brain. This can help prevent degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.
- Supports learning and memory. Your brain will preserve important memories better while clearing away some of the clutter, helping you feel more clear-headed and better able to make decisions.
- Plays a vital role in regulating mood, appetite, and sensuality
- Help our bodies heal from injuries. When we're asleep, our brain can trigger the release of a hormone that helps grow new tissue, which repairs minor injuries and sore muscles.
- Create more white blood cells. This is our defense against bacteria and viruses, lessening our chance of getting sick.

After experiencing or "re-living" a traumatic event, your mind will be spinning and you will also have physical side effects such as increased heartbeat, sweating, dizziness, etcetera. Many survivors may find that at night their brains become vigilant bodyguards, keeping them awake and on high alert for any signs of danger.

The next time your mind wants to replay traumatic memories right at the moment you want to close your eyes, try this: Unload. Trained advocates are available 24/7, and you can remain completely anonymous. Find a hotline near you and talk out your worries, fears, anxieties or questions with someone who can understand what you're going through and, in essence, calm your brain before laying down. You can also chat with an advocate online. If you are not up for talking to a person, try journaling your thoughts and worries and vow to let them go until tomorrow.

1. UNLOAD and DETACH
2. Stick to a sleep schedule and routine, even on weekends. Routines might include a warm bath, reading, a cup of [decaf] tea, yoga or meditation. If you aren't feeling sleepy, get out of bed and try one of the above activities. Return to bed when your eyelids feel heavy.
3. Sleep where you feel safe: Sleep alone, with a safe person for a time, or a stuffed animal. Someone else could sleep close by, you could keep a phone within reach, or keep a dim light on in the bedroom. Become present as you remember locking windows, doors, garage door, and garage yourself.
4. Deliberately add 15-minute increments to your sleep schedule over the course of a week by going to bed 15 minutes earlier or setting your alarm for 15 minutes later.



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5. Exploring appropriate medications or supplements with your physician (be sure to tell your doctor if you are dealing with trauma or have PTSD because some sleep medications are not well suited for these conditions).
6. Seek professional care: There is no right way to process a traumatic experience, but one essential aspect of healing from trauma is knowing when to ask for support. Doctors, counselors, and social workers are trained in helping people cope with and heal from the consequences of a traumatic event.
7. Practice muscle relaxation or give your feet a gentle massage with lotion or sesame oil
8. Practice breathing techniques
9. Take a moment to think of all the positive things in your life
10. Reducing caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine intake after 2:00p
11. Avoiding digital screens for at least ONE HOUR before bed
12. Try using a weighted blanket
13. Drink only small sips of water and eat only easily digestive foods after 6:00p
14. Napping early in the day (for 23 min or less) or not at all
15. Take a hot bath or shower before bed.
16. Listen to a guided meditation, bilateral music, ASMR music, turn on a sound machine app before, or in, bed
17. Exercise early in the day or at least four hours before bed
18. Ensuring bedding is clean, comfortable, and cool
19. Ensuring the room is dark
20. Engage in relaxing activities: bath with essential oils, read a soothing book, thread beads, or cross-stitch
21. Plan your next day. Reducing one's workload and cutting out any unnecessary volunteer assignments, duties, or tasks
22. Ask family members to help you protect your sleep routine
23. Delegate morning pet care to a different family member for a period of time

According to experts, it's better not to force sleep. If you're still lying awake in bed an hour after you laid down, it may be best to get out of bed and engage in a calming, quiet activity instead for 15-20 minutes. You could try a warm bath, reading, pet the dog, or listen to music and then try again.



Sleep Hygiene Protocol

When You Can't Sleep, What to Do Instead of Ruminating

TO INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF RESTFULNESS/SLEEP:

- 1. Develop and follow a consistent sleep schedule even on weekends.** Go to bed and get up at the same times each day, and avoid anything longer than a 10-minute nap during the day.
- 2. Do not use your bed in the daytime** for things like watching TV, talking on the phone, or reading.
- 3. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, heavy meals, and exercise late in the day** before going to sleep.
- 4. When prepared to sleep, turn off the light, and keep the room quiet and the temperature comfortable and relatively cool.** Try an electric blanket if you are cold; putting your feet outside of the blanket or turning on a fan directed toward your bed if you are hot; or wearing a sleeping mask, using earplugs, or turning on a "white noise" machine if needed.
- 5. Give yourself half an hour to at most an hour to fall asleep.** If it doesn't work, evaluate whether you are calm, or anxious (even if only "background anxiety"), or ruminating.
- 6. DO NOT CATASTROPHIZE.** Remind yourself that you need rest, and aim for reverie (i.e., dreaminess) and resting your brain. Sell yourself on the idea that staying awake is not a catastrophe. Do not decide to give up on sleeping for the night and get up for the "day."

IF YOU ARE CALM BUT WIDE AWAKE:

- 7. Get out of bed; go to another room and read a book** or do some other activity that will not wake you up further. As you begin to get tired and/or sleepy, go back to bed.
- 8. Try a light snack** (e.g., an apple).

IF YOU ARE ANXIOUS OR RUMINATING

- 9. Use the cold water TIP skill. Get right back in bed and do the paced breathing TIP skill.**
(See Distress Tolerance Handout 6: TIP Skills: Changing Your Body Chemistry.)
Remember, if you have any medical condition, get medical approval before using cold water.
 - 10. Try the 9-0 meditation practice.** Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly, saying in your mind the number 9. On the next breath out, say 8; then say 7; and so on until you breathe out saying 0. Then start over, but this time start with 8 (instead of 9) as you breathe out, followed by 7, and so on until you reach 0. Next start with 6 as you breathe out, and so on to 0. Then start with 5, then with 4, and so on until you have gone all the way down to starting with 1. (If you get lost, start over with the last number you remember.) Continue until you fall asleep.
 - 11. Focus on the bodily sensation** of the rumination (rumination is often escape from difficult emotional sensations).
 - 12. Reassure yourself** that worries in the middle of the night are just "middle-of-the-night-thinking," and that in the morning you will think and feel differently.
 - 13. Read an emotionally engrossing novel** for a few minutes until you feel somewhat tired. Then stop reading, close your eyes, and try to continue the novel in your head.
 - 14. If rumination doesn't stop,** follow these guidelines: "If it's solvable, solve it. If it is insolvable, go deep into the worry all the way to the "catastrophe"—the very worst outcome you can imagine—and then imagine coping ahead with the catastrophe."
(See Emotion Regulation Handout 19: Build Mastery and Cope Ahead.)
- If nothing else works, with eyes closed, listen to public radio (BBC, NPR, etc.)** at low volume (use headphones if necessary). Public radio is a good choice for this, because there is little fluctuation in voice tone or volume.



EMOTION REGULATION HANDOUT 20A (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 14a)

Nightmare Protocol, Step by Step When Nightmares Keep You from Sleeping

1. Practice relaxation, pleasant imagery, and coping skills first, to be sure you are ready to work on changing your nightmares.

Do progressive relaxation, paced breathing, and/or Wise Mind exercises; listen to music or guided imagery; review the distress tolerance crisis survival skills.

2. Choose a recurring nightmare you would like to work on.

This will be your target nightmare. Select a nightmare you can manage now. Put off trauma nightmares until you are ready to work with them—or, if you target a trauma nightmare, skip Step 3.

3. Write down your target nightmare.

Include sensory descriptions (sights, smells, sounds, tastes, etc.). Also include any thoughts, feelings, and assumptions about yourself during the dream.

4. Choose a changed outcome for the nightmare.

The change should occur BEFORE anything traumatic or bad happens to you or others in the nightmare. Essentially, you want to come up with a change that will prevent the bad outcome of the usual nightmare from occurring. Write an ending that will give you a sense of peace when you wake up.

Note: Changes in the nightmare can be very unusual and out of the ordinary (e.g., you might become a person with superhuman powers who is able to escape to safety or fight off attackers). Changed outcomes can include changed thoughts, feelings, or assumptions about yourself.

5. Write down the full nightmare with the changes.

6. REHEARSE and RELAX each night before going to sleep.

Rehearse the *changed* nightmare by visualizing the entire dream with the changes each night, *before* practicing relaxation techniques.

7. REHEARSE and RELAX during the day.

Visualize the entire dream with the change, and practice relaxation as often as possible during the day.