

Session 4

Daytime Relaxation Techniques and Stress- Reducing Attitudes and Beliefs



Lesson 1: Stress and Sleep



The Links Between Stress and Insomnia

In this session we are going to talk about stress, sleep, and relaxation techniques.

Stress and insomnia are very closely linked:

- Stress is one of the most powerful disrupters of sleep.
- Insomnia is one of the first signs of stress.
- Sleep research shows that many of the negative effects of sleep loss may, in reality, be due to the effects of the stress.

Virtually all insomniacs have experienced stress-induced nights of insomnia:

- Major stressful life events are the most common causes of insomnia.
- Most people have a harder time sleeping on stressful days.
- Remember from Session 3 that stress also plays a primary role in the development of chronic insomnia. This happens because negative thoughts can set off negative emotions that then cause insomnia.

The Effects of Stress

Stress speeds up your brain waves and makes your heart rate and breathing rate more active. Studies have revealed that stress disrupts sleep in two ways:

- Stress reduces deep sleep, which results in lighter, more restless sleep.
- Stress that occurs during the day raises stress hormone levels in the body, even at night.

Lesson 2: Relaxation Techniques and Sleep



The Relaxation Response

Since we know that stress disrupts sleep, a lot of research has focused on the use of relaxation techniques for improving sleep. Dozens of scientific studies have shown that relaxation techniques such as biofeedback, progressive muscle relaxation, and breathing techniques are effective in the treatment of insomnia.

These techniques are effective because they all elicit the relaxation response, which:

- includes reduced physiological activity (e.g., slower brain waves, decreased respiration rate and muscle tension, etc.).
- is the brain's counterbalancing mechanism to the stress response.

The Relaxation Response and Sleep

The relaxation response improves sleep in three ways:

- When practiced during the day, the relaxation response counters daily stress responses. This reduces the chance that stress hormones will be elevated at night.
- When practiced at bedtime or after an awakening, the relaxation response helps to turn off negative sleep thoughts, quiet the brain, and relax the body.
- It helps to quiet the brain by producing a brain wave pattern that is similar to Stage 1 sleep (remember from Session #1 that stage 1 sleep is the transition state between waking and sleeping).

By practicing the relaxation response at bedtime or after a nighttime awakening, it is easier to enter stage 1 sleep and then the other stages of sleep (Stage 2, deep sleep, and dream sleep).

Lesson 3: Learning To Use Relaxation Techniques



There are several steps to using relaxation techniques to improve sleep:

Step One: Relax the muscles throughout your body.

Step Two: Establish a relaxed breathing pattern. Under stress, we tend to breathe using short, shallow, irregular chest breaths, or we hold our breath. When we are relaxed, we breathe with the abdomen using slower, deeper breaths.

Demonstration: You can practice abdominal breathing simply by placing one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Without trying to slow or deepen breathing, simply focus on breathing with your abdomen. If you are breathing abdominally, only the hand on your stomach will move.

Step Three: Direct your attention away from everyday thoughts by choosing a word like "one", "relax", "peace", "heavy", or any other word, and concentrating on the rise and fall of your abdomen as you breathe. Repeat the word silently each time you exhale.

Step Four: Let relaxation occur at its own pace. Do not "try" to relax, and do not worry about whether relaxation is occurring. If distracting thoughts occur, disregard them and return your attention to the mental focusing technique.

When you have 20 minutes, find a quiet place and a comfortable position and try the relaxation techniques. Keep in mind that many people initially find that it is easier to relax the body but harder to quiet the mind. With practice, your ability to relax your body and quiet the mind will improve.

The most effective method for learning relaxation techniques is guided audio instruction as opposed to trying to learn the techniques on your own. The 20 minute relaxation MP3 that is included with this program contains guided relaxation techniques that will teach you how to use

body relaxation, breathing, and relaxing visual imagery to relax your mind and body and fall asleep more easily.

Lesson 4: Practicing Relaxation Techniques During the Day



Before using relaxation techniques to aid sleep, you should practice the techniques for 20 minutes during the day or early evening for the next week. This will allow you to get comfortable and consistent with the relaxation techniques before you begin to use them to help you fall asleep at bedtime or back to sleep during the night. In Session #5, we will review the use of these techniques to help you fall asleep at bedtime or after waking up during the night.

Here are some guidelines for practicing the relaxation techniques during the day or evening for the next week:

- The more you practice, the better the techniques will work for you. If you only practice a few times this week, you are less likely to benefit from the techniques.
- Practice in a comfortable place and position. Since you want to associate your bed with relaxation, the best place to practice your techniques during the day is on your bed.
- Designate a certain time of the day as your 20-minute relaxation time. Afternoon may be the best time to practice, since we have a biological tendency for a nap at that time. If you doze off during the techniques, this is a good sign that your brain will associate the techniques with drowsiness.

Finally, here are some tips for developing stress-reducing attitudes and beliefs that will also improve your sleep by reducing daily stress:

1. You will handle stress better, and sleep better as a result, by promoting optimistic thinking. Here are some strategies for promoting optimism:
 - View setbacks as temporary
 - Avoid generalizing a problem to your whole life
 - Don't dismiss positive events as due to luck
 - Avoid blaming yourself for things beyond your control
 - Practice an attitude of gratitude by focusing on what you have and positive events from the day. We can all find many positives in the course of the day if we look for them.
2. You will sleep better if you view change in your life as normal, constant, and a challenge instead of a threat. Change is stimulating, healthy, and essential for growth and personal development.
3. Develop the attitude that "people need people" and you will minimize the deleterious effects of stress on your sleep. Substantial evidence indicates that people with adequate social support- defined as family, friends, community contacts, social or religious organizations, or even a pet- manage stress better.
4. You will sleep better if you don't expect perfection or that others should always meet your expectations. When perfectionism isn't achieved or the behavior of others does not live up to our expectations, we get angry or frustrated. Be realistic and modify your expectations concerning perfectionism and the behavior of those around you.
5. Empathy and forgiveness reduce stress. If you follow basic religious and spiritual teachings by forgiving when you feel you have been wronged, and treat others as you would have them treat you, you will sleep better, be happier, and healthier.
6. Instead of going to bed angry, put anger in perspective by asking yourself how important an anger-producing situation would be if you only had one week to live. Ask yourself what difference the situation will make next week, month, or year.

Lesson 5: Week #4 Goals



In addition to your goals for the prior week:

Your new goal this week is to begin practicing your 20-minute relaxation exercise during the day or early evening. (When you have completed all seven nights on your sleep diary, e-mail it to Dr. Jacobs to receive your individualized sleep scheduling guidelines. Then go on to Session 5).

Tips for meeting this goal:

To help you practice the relaxation techniques during the day:

- ✓ Designate a specific time of the day and a specific place for your relaxation practice.
- ✓ Remind yourself that relaxation techniques improve sleep, mood, and the ability to handle stress.