



How Does Anxiety Impact Sleep?

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When we worry, we become physiologically stimulated resulting in alertness and difficulty with sleep. Worry gives our brain a signal indicating there is a threat and our body instinctually prepares itself for action. So of course it is hard to sleep.

Tips to Improve Anxiety at Bedtime:

Make Your Bedroom a Worry-Free Zone: Worrying may make you feel productive, but it is actually a very passive process. Instead, designate 20-30 minutes each day to focus on active problem solving. Do your problem solving outside of the bedroom, well before bedtime. Allow the rest of your day to be worry-free by postponing your worry until your designated problem solving time. You can also keep a notepad next to your bed to jot down quick notes to problem solve the next day if necessary.

Wind Down in the Evenings: Your body needs some time to prepare for sleep. It is very challenging to go quickly from high stimulation and action to restful sleep. Give yourself about an hour of down time before bed. You could take a warm shower or do relaxing activities like stretching or reading. Try to stay away from exciting television shows, planning for the next day, big decisions, and serious discussions. Also, make sure to create a comfortable and relaxing bedroom environment that welcomes relaxation.

Reduce Monitoring: Once sleep becomes difficult, we tend to increase our monitoring of internal body sensations, mood, and energy levels. Unfortunately, we often misinterpret these cues for sleep related threats. For example, one might notice how groggy they feel when they wake up in the morning and interpret that feeling as having a poor night's sleep. However, it is perfectly normal to feel tired for 5-20 minutes when you transition from sleep to wakefulness even with a good night's sleep. Therefore, our interpretations are not always accurate and usually result in more worry and hypervigilance.

Stop Watching the Clock: When worrying at night, we also start to become obsessed with the time. What time is it? How much time do I have left to sleep? How long did I sleep? While you might really want to track your sleep, looking at the clock only increases your arousal levels. Additionally, research has shown we tend to overestimate how long it takes us to fall asleep as well as underestimate our total sleep. This is mostly due to the fact that falling asleep is defined

by the absence of memory, making our estimations of sleep very inaccurate. So turn your clocks around so you can't see the time, because honestly knowing the time is actually making it worse.

Release Control: When we try to control our worry and our sleep, they paradoxically tend to get worse, not better. Trying to control or suppress our thoughts is not effective. Instead, we have to accept our thoughts, letting them come in and then eventually go out. It's our interpretations of thoughts that give them importance. In the same way, we have to trust that our bodies will rest when they need to rest as well as trust our ability to function without perfect sleep.