



BETTER SLEEP FOR VOICE HEARERS

RUTH LAMBLEY, YORK HEARING VOICES GROUP

Many voice hearers report problems sleeping

Poor sleep can mean not being able to fall asleep in the first place, waking during the night, waking up too early or not feeling refreshed on waking. It is common for voice hearers to report that their voices are worse at night, and that the night time means they cannot use their usual coping strategies such as going for a walk. People are also often alone at night, lacking distraction, and in trying to unwind for the night, their lack of occupation may bring on their voices.

Particular problems for voice hearers might be voices or visions or other sensations preventing them from falling asleep, or voices waking them from their sleep during the night.

General tips

- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine for six hours before bedtime.
- Street drugs and some prescription drugs may also interfere with sleep, so ask your pharmacist for advice.
- Large meals and strenuous exercise in the evening may also keep you awake.
- Make sure your bedroom is a calm, quiet place to sleep, that your bed and bedding are comfortable, that the temperature and light levels suit you, that you have enough
- fresh air, and that your curtains are thick enough to keep out early morning light.
- Only use your bedroom for sleep and don't go to bed unless you are tired.
- Exercise during the day can help with sleep.

- Try to keep to a regular routine, relaxing and winding down, going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.
- Some people find relaxation techniques useful, for example deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.
- Don't try and force yourself to sleep; that will only make you more anxious.
- Importantly, no matter how tired you are, don't sleep during the day.
- Have a regular routine, for example having a bubble bath and a soothing non-caffeinated drink before bed every day.
- Some people use calming, comforting fragrances such as lavender, for example, spraying them on their pillow.
- Food and drink may be useful, for example a banana and a glass of milk, or warm milk with teaspoon of honey.
- Having a comfortable bedroom environment is important, make sure you're well supported by pillows; some people find a heavy duvet or cuddly toy comforting.
- Some people find a large bowl of pasta helpful; while others find eating keeps them awake.
- Some people find herbal tea helpful, for example, chamomile.
- Other people find herbal remedies, sedating antihistamine or prescribed sleeping medicines useful. You should be aware that some of these are habit forming and may not be useful in the long term.
- Other techniques include the 'body scan' where you tense then release every part of your body, systematically working up from the feet; some people find counting their breaths helpful.
- Some people can use their spiritual beliefs to help them relax, for example, praying, tarot/angel/guidance cards, dream catchers, crystals and stones and readings to clear their mind ready for sleep.
- Some people are able to make agreements with their voices, for example, "I will listen to you for 30 minutes, after that please be quiet and let me sleep".
- Other people are able to call on good voices that can calm and reassure them.
- Some people find visualising a relaxing scene or concentrating on pleasant memories helpful and calming.
- Another idea is doing some sort of relaxing art – doodling or colouring in can be soothing and are very effective distractions.

General relaxation techniques can be very useful, for example using grounding techniques such as the 5,4,3,2,1 technique where you concentrate on 5 things you can see; 4 things you can hear; 3 things you are touching; 2 things you can smell; and 1 thing you can taste.

What to do if voices disturb your sleep

Some voice hearers find that listening calming voices on audiobooks, listening the radio or watching TV with the sound turned down low allows them to avoid concentrating on their voices, providing welcome distraction. Try to avoid stimulating programmes that require concentration. Particularly useful are devices with time switches that will turn them off after a set period of time to prevent it disturbing sleep later in the night.

Some voice hearers find listening to “white noise” (i.e. the sound created by a fan) allows them to block out their voices. On the other hand, some people find ear plugs to be more helpful for blocking out their voices. If you find yourself lying in bed and listening to your voices in an unhelpful way, sometimes getting up and going into another room and finding something calming to do such as watching TV, reading, or listening to the radio. This can be enough to

What to do if visions disturb your sleep

Some people who see visions find sleeping with the light on dimly helps. You could also try using night lights, lava lamps, fairy lights, glow in the dark stars or fibre optic lamps. Conversely, other people find eye shades to be a useful method for managing their visions. Some people are able to use visualisation techniques, for example, imagining a protective force-field to fend off unwanted visions.

What to do if sensations disturb your sleep

Sometimes sensations such as feeling insects crawling, pain, or feeling their limbs change shape disturbs people’s sleep. Solutions might include switching the light on so you can see the affected area, or massaging the affected area gently.

What to do if you get woken up in the night

If you have trouble getting to sleep or get woken in the night, some people find it helpful to use a repeated phrase (sometimes called a mantra) for example, repeating “calm and relaxed” over and over again. Other people recite poems or prayers to distract them and allow them to sleep. For some people, having a written note by their bed with calming and reassuring messages to themselves, for example, “this experience is transitory and will pass” to read if they can’t sleep or wake in the night.

Some people find writing down what they are experiencing useful. Sometimes a worry box might help – write down your worries and post them in the box to deal with in the morning. Sometimes getting out of bed and doing something calming, like drinking warm milk, listening to the radio, reading something relaxing or watching television for a while might be more helpful than lying in bed awake.

Some people find it helpful to repeat a reassuring phrase, for example “I am aware of this thought. I’m not going to let it upset me, or make me anxious and worried. This thought will pass”.

What to do if you have intrusive thoughts

Everyone experiences intrusive thoughts that come and go all day. However, these feelings can feel particularly intense at night when you’re trying to get to sleep. Mindfulness techniques can be very useful in coping with such thoughts. One technique is to visualize the thoughts as clouds passing in the sky. Watch them travel past, without reacting to them emotionally, remaining mentally detached.

*Sometimes you just need to accept that you can't sleep.
Becoming anxious and stressed about it will just make it worse.*

What to do if you have nightmares

Nightmares are normal after trauma. Having nightmares can be the brain's way of attempting to make sense of a horrific situation. The situation is not hopeless. Some people believe you can influence your dreams by planning your behaviour in them and changing how you act in them. Use your imagination to have better dreams. Seek help in your dream, maybe find shelter or ask other dream characters for help, offer help to those characters in trouble. As you take action in your nightmares you will be helping yourself gather resources for coping in the waking world. (From: "Guidelines for Coping with Nightmares After Trauma", Patricia Garfield).