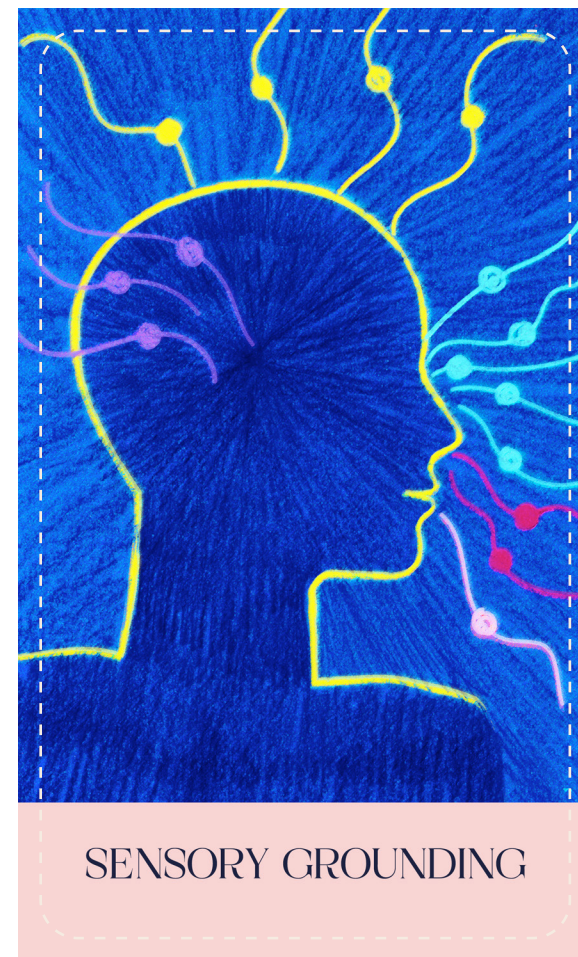




COMFORTERS



SLEEPING
SOMEWHERE NEW



SENSORY GROUNDING

SENSORY GROUNDING

WHAT?

Try the 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding method.

Take your time and focus on noticing the details of five things you see, four things you feel, three things you hear, two things you smell, and one thing you taste.

Pay attention to subtle features like the texture of a leaf, the pressure of your feet on the floor or quietly rustling clothing. Seek pleasant scents like flowers or soap; and notice any lingering taste.

WHY?

This mindfulness-based practice can be used for reducing stress during the day, as well as relaxing before sleep.

It helps to calm the nervous system by shifting your attention away from racing thoughts, and back to your immediate environment.



SLEEPING SOMEWHERE NEW

WHAT?

When sleeping somewhere different, try to replicate your usual environment, schedule, and wind-down routine as best you can.

Use an eye mask and ear plugs if necessary to block out distractions. If you feel anxious or tense, try relaxation exercises like progressive muscle relaxation or breathwork.

WHY?

To keep you safe, your brain is wired to stay alert in unfamiliar surroundings. This means you might experience a 'first night effect' of poorer sleep on the first night but after a night or two, the brain learns to treat the new environment as safe.

Making the environment seem familiar, following the same routine, and taking time to relax all signal safety to the brain and help improve sleep.

COMFORTERS

WHAT?

Comforters like blankets, teddies or other plush toys act as transitional objects; they help ease the transition between one thing and another, like wake and sleep, or moving from one life stage to another.

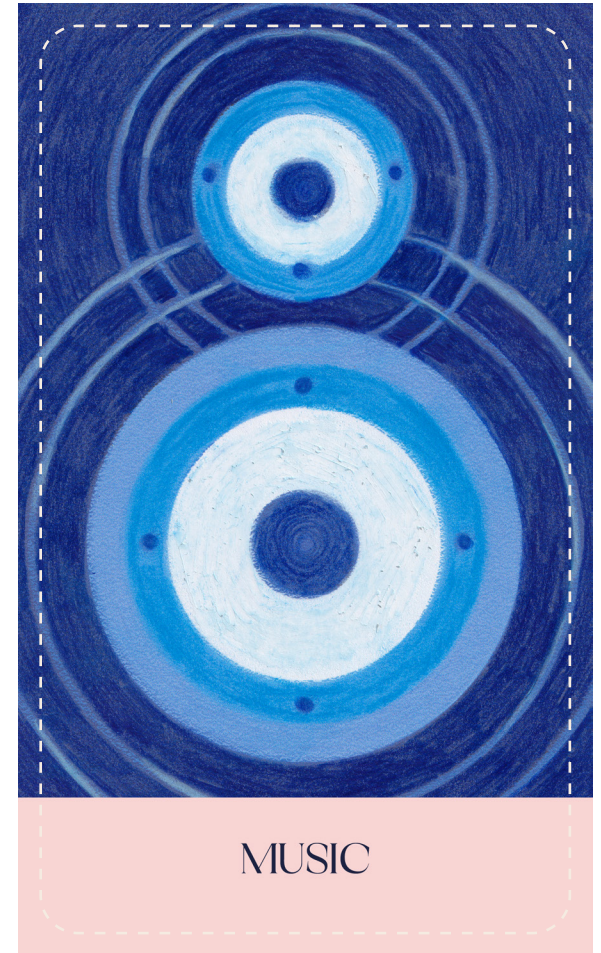
Try incorporating a comforter into your sleep routine.

WHY?

Comforters, especially familiar ones, provide a sense of stability, security and nostalgia which can be calming and reassuring.

Hugging a soft toy and feeling the material can help with sensory grounding, emotional regulation, and reducing stress by increasing oxytocin and reducing cortisol. The tactile sensation and familiarity as part of a wind-down routine can help with falling asleep.





MUSIC

WHAT?

Listen to slow-tempo, relaxing music at low volume to wind down in the evening.

Try classical music or gentle instrumental tracks without lyrics or emotional charge.

WHY?

Enjoying music boosts mood, helping to distract from daily stress and reduce anxiety.

This has effects on the body like reduced blood pressure, heart and respiratory rates; all helping with sleep.

Listening to music to wind down is associated with falling asleep faster and having better sleep quality.



VISUALISATION

WHAT?

Create a 10-minute mental movie of a relaxing scene.

Use a scene from your memory as a starting place and immerse all your senses in the visualisation.

Practise each day until you know your movie by heart. Take yourself there in your mind to help you fall asleep or get back to sleep after a night waking.

WHY?

Negative thoughts are often accompanied by unwanted images.

Visualisation is helpful for replacing negative images with pleasant ones.

It is easier to focus and maintain attention if you have a scene prepared so that you don't need to improvise.



COGNITIVE GROUNDING

WHAT?

If you often have nightmares or traumatic flashbacks, have a prepared grounding statement that you can repeat to reassure yourself that you are safe in the present moment.

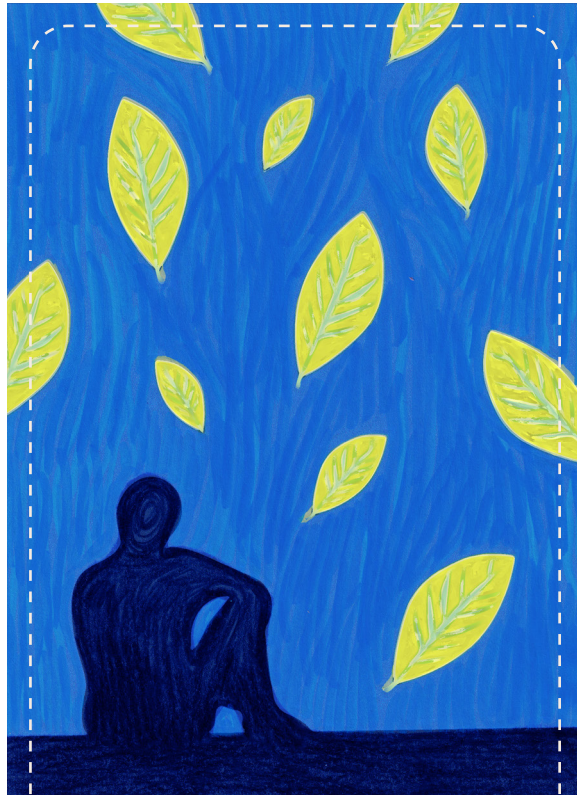
For example, *"I am (name) and I'm in (place). This is just a memory/nightmare, and I am safe right now. This will pass"*.

WHY?

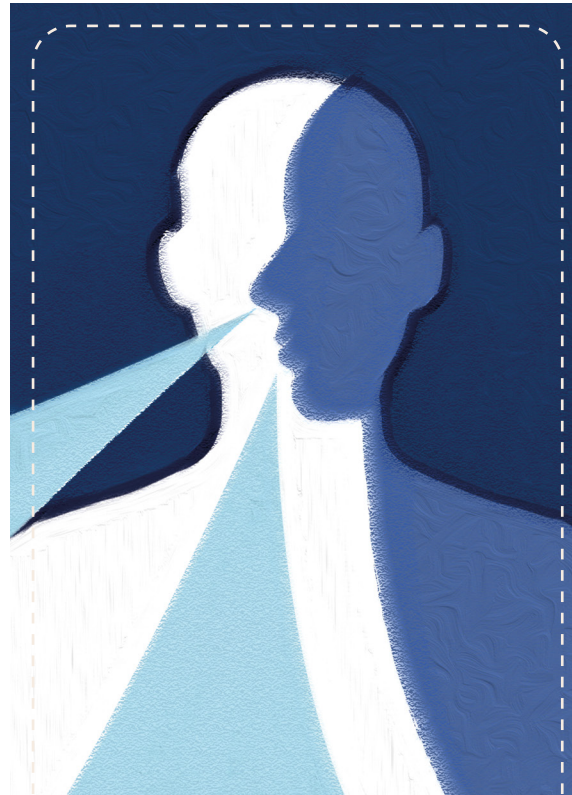
Traumatic flashbacks or nightmares are fearful and can make us feel panicked, confused, and overwhelmed.

Cognitive grounding helps to restore a sense of control by shifting your brain from emotional overwhelm to logical, structured thinking.

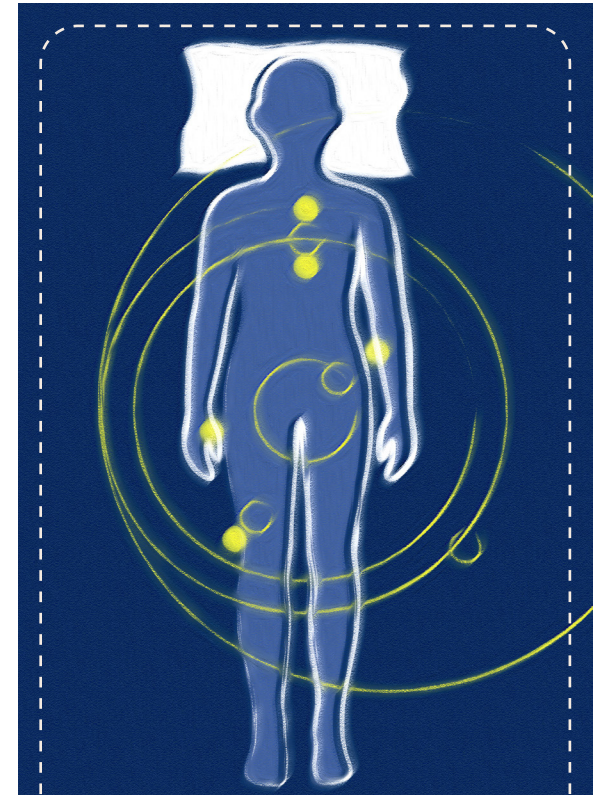




THOUGHT DIFUSION



BREATHWORK



BODY SCAN

BODY SCAN

WHAT?

Close your eyes or soften your gaze and focus your attention from the top of your head to your toes, gently scanning down your body. Take it slowly and focus on each part of your body in turn, noticing sensations without judging them.

If your mind wanders, gently return your focus to your body.

You can do this relaxing in bed at bedtime, or to take a mindful break during the day.

WHY?

Spending time each day to focus on your body is associated with greater mindfulness, reduced stress, and increased psychological wellbeing.

It's a great relaxation tool for calming the nervous system and helping with sleep.



BREATHWORK

WHAT?

Relax your breathing. Keep it slow and deep, engaging your diaphragm to really fill your lungs. Make your out-breath longer than your in-breath for optimum relaxation.

- ✦ Try 478 breathing: breathe deeply in through your nose for the count of 4, hold for 7, then slowly out through your mouth for 8. Repeat for about five minutes to relax your body in the evening or during the night, or just take a few deep breaths for moments of calm throughout the day.

WHY?

Your breathing affects your heartbeat via the vagus nerve, which is part of the parasympathetic nervous system, responsible for 'rest and digest' functions, rather than 'fight or flight'.

Activating the vagus nerve by deep breathing slows heart rate and aids physiological relaxation.

THOUGHT DIFUSION

WHAT?

Try the Leaves on a Stream thought defusion exercise. Before bed, sit quietly and imagine a gentle stream with leaves floating by on the surface.

Each time a thought arises, whether anxious, joyful, or random, imagine placing the thought on a leaf and letting it float downstream. There's no need to analyse or push them away. Just notice and let them pass.

WHY?

This activity helps create distance from unhelpful thoughts without trying to suppress them, allowing your mind to settle naturally.

Instead of fighting racing thoughts it encourages you to accept all thoughts, even the uncomfortable ones, and to practice letting them go. It can help to release worries about sleep that make insomnia worse.

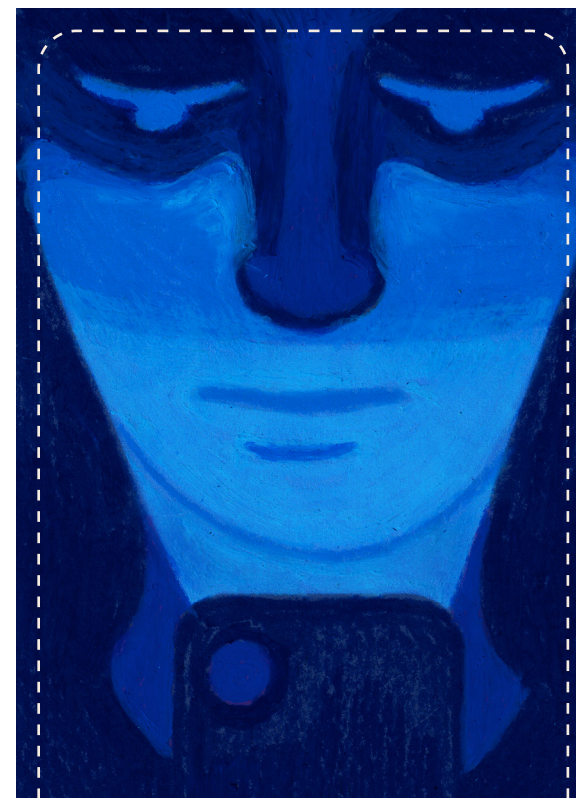




PROGRESSIVE
MUSCLE RELAXATION



REGULAR
WAKE TIME



SCREEN-FREE
HOUR

SCREEN-FREE HOUR

WHAT?

Reserve the last hour before bed for relaxing screen-free activities.

Put your phone into sleep mode or do not disturb so that notifications don't alert you whilst you are winding down or during the night. Let friends and family know that you won't be contactable unless it's important.

WHY?

Screens give off light, which reduces melatonin release; but worse than that, the things we often use them for – like work, reading the news, or scrolling social media – are stimulating and can negatively affect our mood.

Avoiding screens before bed will make it easier to fall asleep.

* ★ *

REGULAR WAKE TIME

WHAT?

Keep a regular schedule, even at weekends. See your wake time as the anchor for your day and try not to vary it by more than about half an hour on most days.

Keeping a consistent wake time is more important than sticking to the same bedtime.

WHY?

The circadian rhythm, or body clock, is determined by chemical and physiological changes that fluctuate throughout the day, including the hormone cortisol, which helps you feel alert in the morning, and melatonin, the hormone that tells your body when to sleep.

By maintaining a consistent schedule, these physiological changes can predictably support you to feel alert or sleepy at the right times of day.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

WHAT?

Spend around 15 minutes tensing each muscle in your body for a few seconds, then relaxing, progressively moving from head to toes.

Notice the contrasting sensations between tension and relaxation. You don't need to tense too strongly, just enough to notice the difference.

This activity is best done during the day or evening to help reduce stress in the body.

WHY?

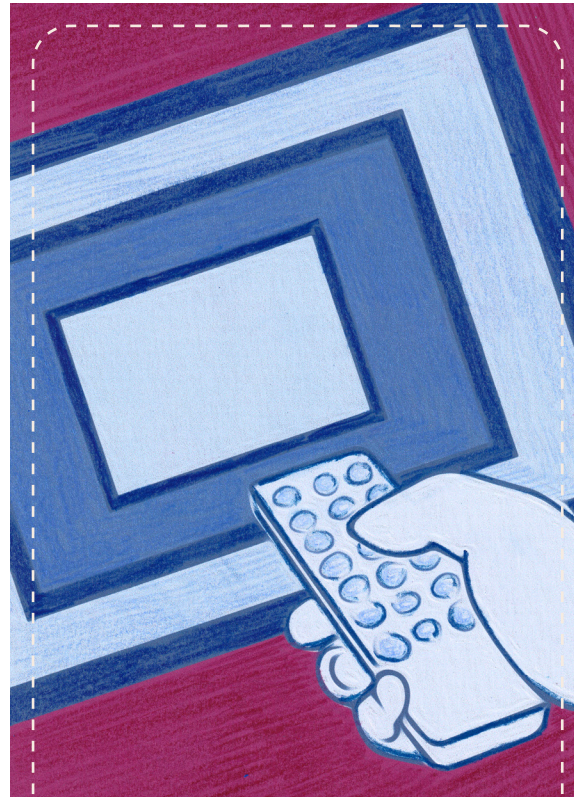
Progressive muscle relaxation helps to lower blood pressure and heart rate, and reduce physical tension at night.

Regular practice can help you to fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.

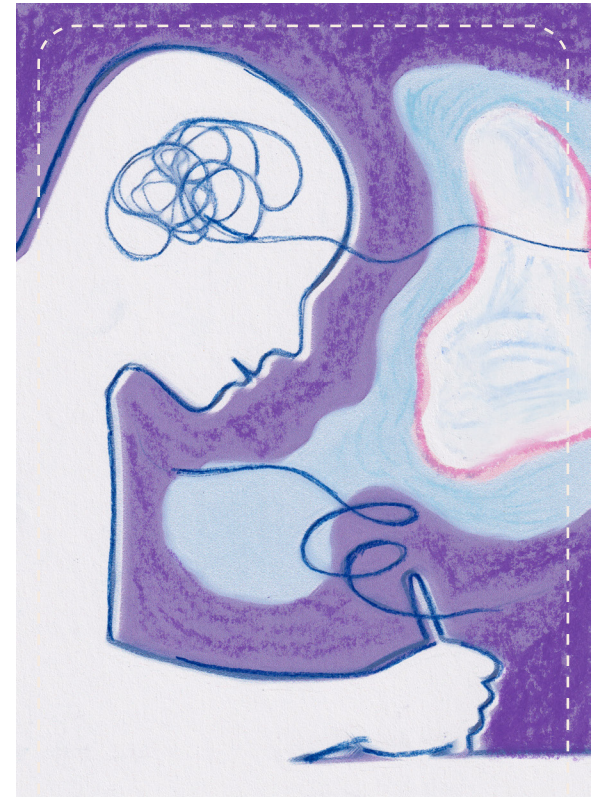
* ★ *



WIND-DOWN



DON'T DELAY
BEDTIME



JOURNALLING

JOURNALLING

WHAT?

In the evening, at least two hours before bedtime, spend a few minutes writing about your day and whatever is on your mind.

Reflect on your experience, what you have learnt from it and whether there is anything you would do differently in future.

Write down any thoughts, worries, or feelings, and gently let them go, knowing they won't help you sleep. When finished, close your journal to put your day to rest.

WHY?

Journaling is a therapeutic writing tool that invites you to organise your thoughts and reflect on experiences without pressure. It can help identify and monitor unhelpful thoughts and behaviours. Processing your day before bedtime frees up your mind for restful sleep.



DON'T DELAY BEDTIME

WHAT?

Bedtime procrastination is the common habit of delaying going to bed, often by engaging in activities like scrolling on your phone, watching TV, or doing chores. Staying up later than intended, despite feeling tired, often stems from a desire to reclaim personal time after a busy day, or to distract from difficult emotions.

Try setting a clear, consistent bedtime routine, set aside time to relax, and reduce stimulating activities before bed to signal to your brain that it's time to wind down.

WHY?

Delaying bedtime might seem enjoyable in the moment but can lead to sleep deprivation which negatively affects mood, concentration, and health. You will feel better-able to deal with difficult emotions when well-rested.

WIND-DOWN

WHAT?

Use the last hour before bed for a relaxing wind-down routine that you can follow every night.

Everyone is different in what they find relaxing, but you might include getting ready for bed, reading, journaling, gratitude, breathwork, spiritual practice, relaxation practice, stretching, sexual activity, listening to podcasts, audiobooks, or music, or craft activities like drawing, colouring, painting, knitting, crochet, paper crafts, scrapbooking, or modelling.

WHY?

Sleep isn't like a light switch that can just be switched on or off, it's more like a dimmer switch that needs to be slowly turned down. A predictable routine creates a strong association with sleep, signalling to your body that it is time to relax, making it easier to fall asleep.





DREAM COMPLETION



GO TO BED WHEN
SLEEPY



DARK BEDROOM
AT NIGHT

DARK BEDROOM AT NIGHT

WHAT?

Ensure that your bedroom is as dark as possible whilst you sleep. Put up blackout blinds or wear a sleep eye mask if necessary.

Check for standby lights, alarm clock lights, and blinking electronics: switch them off, turn them around, or cover them.

If you need a night light, use a red or amber bulb, not a white one.

WHY?

Light during the night interferes with the release of melatonin, the sleep hormone, which helps with falling and staying asleep.

Even a small amount of light through closed eyelids can make a difference.



GO TO BED WHEN SLEEPY

WHAT?

Only go to bed when you feel sleepy, as opposed to tired. Signs you are sleepy might include yawning, eyes feeling dry, achy or heavy, rubbing eyes, difficulty maintaining attention or posture.

With tiredness or fatigue, you may feel mentally or physically exhausted and tasks require more effort, but you don't necessarily feel sleepy. Wait for sleepiness before going to bed.

WHY?

If you feel sleepy, you are more likely to fall asleep quickly, strengthening the mental association between your bed and sleep.

If you go to bed too early it might take a while to fall asleep, leaving you feeling frustrated, and strengthening the mental association between bed and wakefulness.

DREAM COMPLETION WHAT?

If you experience nightmares, try writing a new, more powerful ending and adding more positive elements.

Spend 10 minutes each evening visualising the new dream in detail.

For example, if your nightmare is about being chased by a monster through a dark forest, you might change the monster into a large fluffy cat, climb on its back and explore the forest together. If you are attacked by a group of villains, you might use your magic wand to turn them into feathers.

WHY?

Spending a few minutes each day resolving the issue faced in the nightmare and modifying negative emotions and imagery helps to displace the unwanted content, making it less likely to occur during sleep.





LUCID DREAMING

WHAT?

Lucid dreaming is the experience of becoming aware that you are dreaming while still asleep. It is a skill that can be learnt, giving you some control over the dream's content, environment, or your actions within the dream.

It typically occurs during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the stage when most vivid dreams happen.

WHY?

Lucid dreaming is reported to be enjoyable and empowering, allowing people to explore their creativity, face fears, or simply have fun in a safe, dream-created world. Some use it as a tool for problem-solving or personal growth, and it has been used to treat insomnia.

However, frequent lucid dreaming or attempts to induce it might cause disrupted or fragmented sleep.



GET UP IF YOU CAN'T SLEEP

WHAT?

If you can't get to sleep, get up and do something relaxing, like reading or craft activities, until you feel sleepy enough to try again. Avoid spending long periods awake feeling frustrated in bed.

WHY?

Over time, the frustration of not sleeping will lead to anxiety and frustration about not being able to sleep, making it almost impossible to fall asleep.

By getting out of bed when you can't sleep, you will break down the association between being awake and frustrated in bed. You'll also be building up sleep pressure so, by the time you try again, sleep should come easier.

Over time, this will help to reduce sleep anxiety at bedtime.

HIDE THE CLOCK

WHAT?

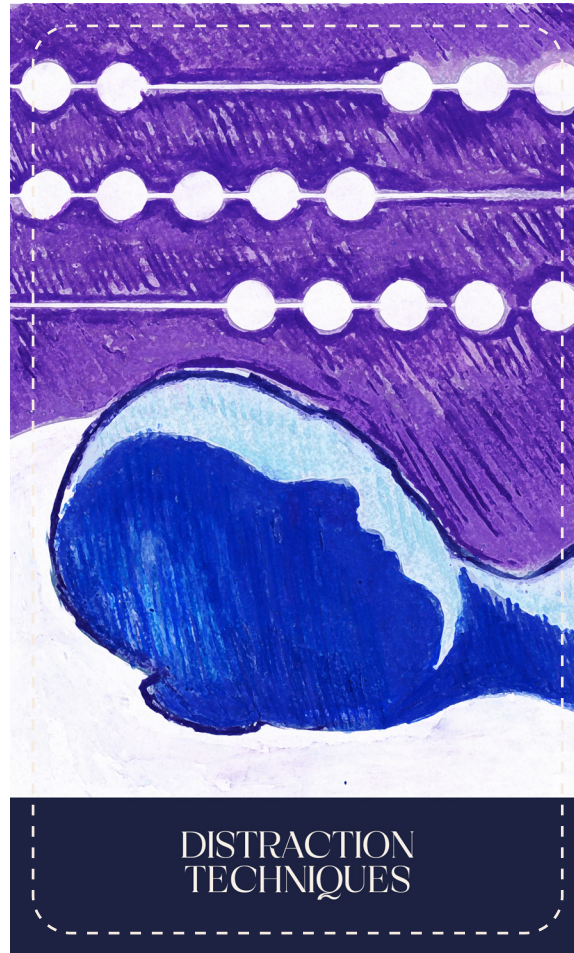
Don't check the time during the night. If necessary, turn your bedside clock away from you and put your phone away from your bed.

WHY?

Checking the time and clock-watching fuels mental calculations so increases alertness and anxiety about how much sleep is being lost. This increases frustration and pressure to sleep.

If you struggle to fall asleep, or wake in the night, trust your body and use relaxation and/or distraction techniques instead of worrying about the time.





PARADOXICAL INTENTION

WHAT?

Practice paradoxical intention by trying to do the opposite of sleeping: lie in bed and try to stay awake. You can close your eyes or keep them open but relaxed, and give yourself permission to be awake.

Tell yourself that it's ok to be awake for now, you are relaxing your body, and you'll fall asleep when you are ready.

WHY?

Trying to sleep creates a great deal of performance anxiety as we don't know if, or when, sleep will happen.

Our minds often work paradoxically so, by trying to do the opposite of sleeping, performance anxiety slowly diminishes.



DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

WHAT?

Try a distraction technique when you get into bed or if you wake in the night. If you lose your place, just pick up where you left off, or start again.

HOW?

Numeric distraction: in your head, count backwards from 1,000 in 7s.

Alphabetic distraction: list categories of words where each word begins with the last letter of the previous word. Cities could be Paris, Stockholm, Munich, etc.

Visual Distraction: imagine a relaxing walk somewhere you know well in vivid sensory detail.

WHY?

When our mind is empty, we often start worrying or having negative thoughts that keep us awake. Distraction techniques quiet a racing mind by giving you something else to concentrate on.

ARTICULATORY SUPPRESSION

WHAT?

Articulatory suppression is a distraction technique good for suppressing the inner voice. It is to be used when you get into bed, or if you wake in the night.

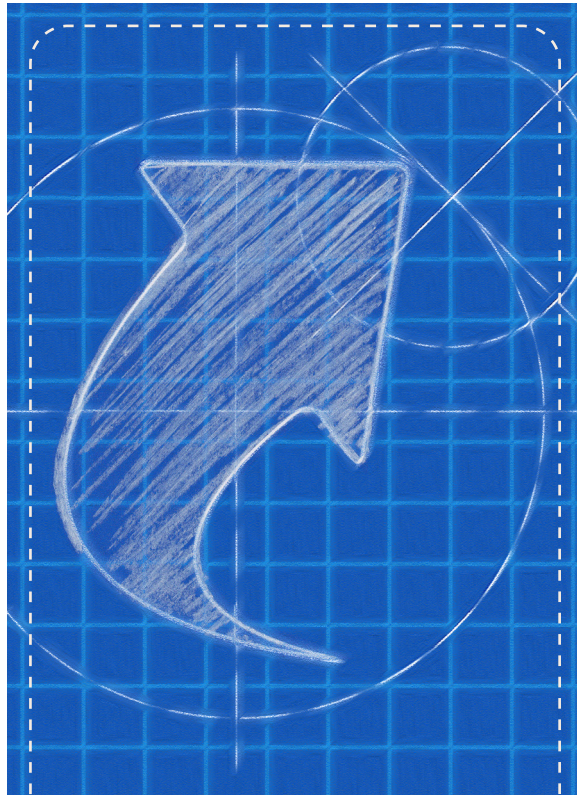
Mime the word 'the' under your breath, about once every two seconds. Keep going for as long as you can.

WHY?

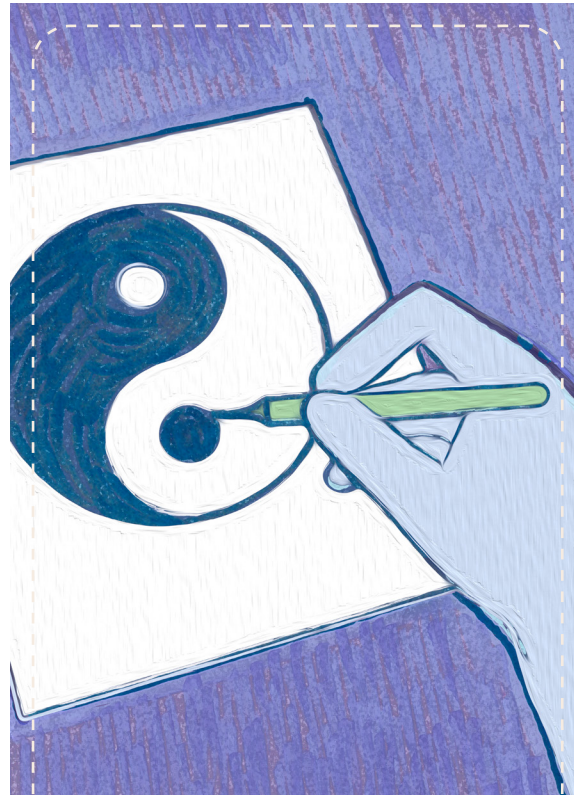
This technique is good for suppressing trivial random thoughts by talking over your inner voice that won't be quiet.

It uses the mental articulatory loop, making it difficult to think verbal thoughts whilst miming a word.





PLAN TOMORROW



COGNITIVE
RESTRUCTURING



CATASTROPHISING

CATASTROPHISING

WHAT?

This activity is helpful if you often lie awake worrying about a catastrophe, e.g., crashing your car or losing your job due to sleep deprivation.

Using a calculator, work out the probability that the catastrophe will happen tomorrow, e.g., if you have had insomnia for 3 years ($3 \times 365 = 1,095$ days) and have crashed your car once ($(1/1,095) \times 100 = 0.09\%$ chance you will crash your car tomorrow).

WHY?

Catastrophic thinking at night is more common, unrealistic and negative, compared to during the day. Even simple issues can seem far worse than they are. Rationalise these thoughts during the day so that if they occur at night you can remind yourself how unlikely the worst case scenario really is.



COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

WHAT?

If you catch yourself having negative or unhelpful thoughts about sleep, write the thought down and ask yourself whether it is 100% true 100% of the time. Look for evidence, no matter how insignificant it seems. Next, write a more helpful statement to contradict the unhelpful thought.

WHY?

Everyone has negative thoughts or limiting beliefs at times, which affect our emotions and stop us achieving our goals and living our best. Keeping a record of negative thoughts alongside a more helpful alternative is a structured tool to make thought processes more positive.

When used for sleep-related thoughts this helps to reduce anxiety around sleep, making it easier to fall and stay asleep.

PLAN TOMORROW

WHAT?

In the evening, at least two hours before bed, check your schedule for tomorrow and list anything that you need to do to feel prepared.

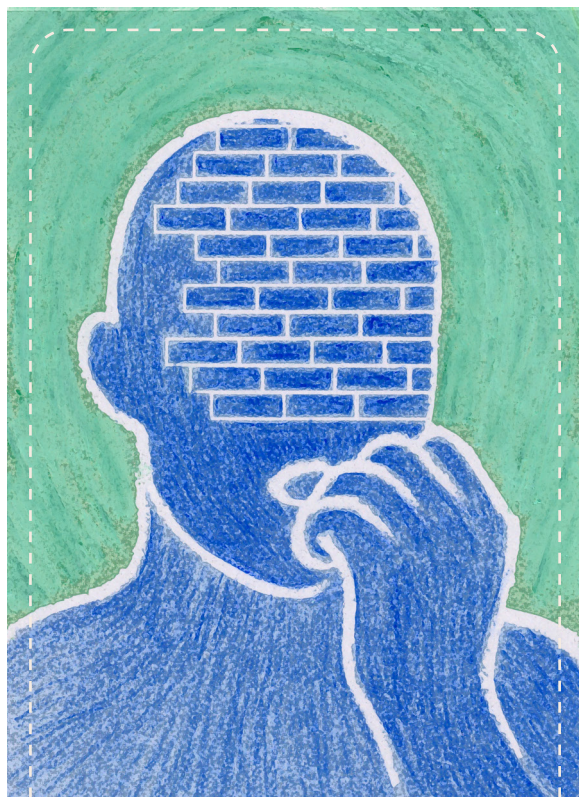
This might include packing your bag, deciding your outfit, checking travel arrangements, or last-minute preparations. Write a short to-do list of anything that needs doing, and plan when to do it.

WHY?

When we can't sleep our minds often turn to thoughts of planning and problem solving, which often involves thinking about what is coming up the next day and worrying that we are not prepared for it.

Planning in advance helps offload these thoughts and ease anxiety by knowing what's ahead and that it is under control.





CONSTRUCTIVE
WORRY



GRATITUDE

GRATITUDE

WHAT?

Spend a few minutes before bed focussing on what you are grateful for. You can write it down, do a guided gratitude meditation, or visualise.

Try focussing on three things you were grateful for today, or reflecting on some things that made you smile.

WHY?

Drawing attention to the good things shifts our attention away from stress and worry to more positive emotions. It reduces anxiety, depression, and rumination, and helps us to feel safe and content.

Practicing gratitude, by any means, calms the mind and can help with falling asleep faster and sleeping longer.



CONSTRUCTIVE WORRY

WHAT?

In a notebook, create two columns titled "Concerns" and "Solutions", then list the worries most likely to keep you awake, and the next steps to resolve them. Plan any tasks that need completing, then close your notebook and place by your bed with a pen.

If anything new comes up, write it down, remind yourself you have dealt with concerns in the best way, and will deal with anything new tomorrow.

Dedicate 10-15 minutes per day, at least 2 hours before bedtime.

WHY?

Worrying makes it difficult to fall asleep, and we are not our best at planning and problem-solving when we are tired. Scheduling time each day to deal with day-to-day worries helps reduce rumination.