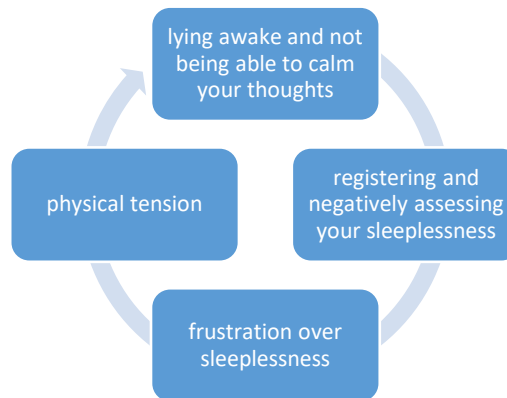


## Tips for sleep disorders

A good night's sleep is a good foundation for meeting the demands of your studies and everyday life. However, problems falling asleep and staying asleep are common and can have many different causes. If your sleep problems are severe and persistent, you may want to see a doctor to make sure there are no physical causes. However, changing your environment or using mental techniques or relaxation techniques can often break the cycle of insomnia.



We have put together some tips to help you sleep better.

### Sleep Hygiene

- **Sleep cycle**

Make sure you go to bed and wake up at similar times during the week and at weekends to get into a regular sleep pattern. It is also important that you only go to bed when you feel really tired, to reduce the chances of lying awake and feeling frustrated about not being able to sleep. Even taking a nap in the afternoon can have a negative effect on your sleep cycle.

- **Bedtime routine**

A regular bedtime routine, such as making a cup of tea, laying out your clothes for the next day or brushing your teeth, can also help.

- **Separating work and sleep areas**

Even if it's not possible to separate the areas you use for working and sleeping, it's still important to use your bed only for sleeping. If you also use your bed for studying, you are more likely to think about your academic obligations before falling asleep. Conversely, it is also important to sleep only in your bed and nowhere else.

- **Create a positive atmosphere**

Create an atmosphere that is conducive to sleep with the right temperature, fresh air and quiet (use ear plugs if necessary). Try not to look at the clock at night.

- **Calm activities before bedtime**

Physical and mental exertion before going to bed can make it harder to fall asleep by over-activating your body. Quiet activities can help you prepare for sleep.

- **No alcohol or caffeine before going to sleep**

Alcohol and caffeine affect brain activity and can interfere with the process of falling asleep and staying asleep.

## Mental Techniques

### ▪ Reality check

You can do a reality check to curb worries or fears that come up when you're lying awake (such as "If I don't sleep well tonight, I won't get anything done tomorrow"). To perform a reality check, observe whether you actually get anything done on a sleep-deprived day. You will probably find that you can still get things done with little sleep.

### ▪ Re-evaluate your thoughts

A central component in the development and maintenance of sleep problems is catastrophizing. Instead of anxious thoughts, try to formulate appropriate and helpful thoughts. These will reduce negative feelings about sleep and therefore your physical tension. For example, try "Although I feel better when I sleep better, I can perform well with less sleep".

### ▪ Stop those thoughts

Most of the time we are not really able to solve problems at night. Instead, thinking at night usually means ruminating. This type of thinking is characterized by your thoughts going round in circles. It can be very useful to break this cycle. To do this, say "STOP" out loud or picture a stop sign. Then actively think of a calm, relaxing image.

### ▪ Designated rumination space outside of your bedroom

If your thoughts are persistent and won't go away, get out of bed and sit in a place you've designated as your "rumination spot". Think about whatever is bothering you for a while, and only go back to bed when you have stopped thinking about it. Writing down your thoughts can also help to structure them and, if necessary, deal with them again the next day.

## Relaxation

- Relaxation techniques can be learned from CDs, the internet or by attending classes. They can help you cope better with stress and should be practiced in everyday life. Then you will be able to use them to help you fall asleep when you need to.

- **Progressive muscle relaxation according to Jacobson (PMR)**

- This technique involves deliberately tensing and then relaxing individual muscle groups, which can help you achieve a deep state of relaxation.

- **Autogenic training**

- This technique uses a mental focus of warmth and heaviness on different parts of the body, which can lead to a state of relaxation.

- **Imagination exercises**

- You can use imagery to focus your thoughts, such as the well-known method of counting sheep.

- Your activities can also help you relax: For example, a warm bath or freshly laundered, fragrant sheets can have a calming effect. Gentle exercise such as an evening bike ride, jogging or yoga can also be relaxing.

## Literature

Spiegelhalder, K., Backhaus, J. & Riemann, D. (2011). *Schlafstörungen*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.