

How to get a great night's sleep: Could less mean more?

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If you regularly struggle to fall asleep, it might be better to try and restrict rather than extend the amount of time you spend in bed.

According to the new Good-Night Guide from The Sleep Council, sleep restriction can help people who only manage limited sleep, to fall asleep faster and wake up fewer times.

It's a new approach to helping problem [sleepers](#), the idea being to build a strong association between your bed and sleep. Anyone, for example,

only getting five hours sleep a night but spending seven hours in bed, may benefit from limiting themselves to just five hours in bed at night.

It's a method that may make you more tired at first, but will ultimately make you fall asleep faster and achieve better quality sleep.

"It's not suitable if you're only getting a couple of hours sleep and should be supervised by a qualified Cognitive Behavioural Therapist," says Jessica Alexander of The Sleep Council.

Commonly prescribed for depression, [clinical trials](#) have now shown that CBT is the most effective long-term solution for insomniacs. It helps to identify the negative attitudes and beliefs that hinder sleep and replaces them with positive thoughts.

A typical exercise is to set aside 30 minutes in which to do your day's worrying. During the worry period you keep a diary of negative thoughts, the very act of writing them down being believed to reduce them. Worrying is banned at any other time of the day and once in bed, with eyes closed, each worry should be pictured floating away in a balloon, leaving the mind free and unencumbered.

The technique is just one of a host of ways in which people who struggle to sleep can be helped.

Research also shows that sleeping on an uncomfortable bed could rob you of up to an hour's sleep – yet the deterioration may be so gradual and invisible that many people fail to make the connection between an uncomfortable bed and poor sleep. The Sleep Council advises thinking about replacing your bed after about seven years.

"Getting a good night's sleep can be dependent on a whole range of factors – from diet and exercise to the importance of a good bed to a

good night's sleep," says Jessica. The Good-Night Guide covers seven practical steps to getting a good night's [sleep](#), offering advice on the bedroom itself, lifestyle, how to deal with stress and worry, diet, exercise, relaxation and other therapies and the effects of hormonal balance.

More information: www.perfectsleepenvironment.org.uk

Provided by The Sleep Council

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