

Need better sleep? Consider the cognitive shuffle

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Simon Fraser University research aimed at helping people get to sleep will be highlighted at an international sleep conference next week. Luc Beaudoin, an adjunct professor in cognitive science and education, created the [mySleepButton](#) app two years ago (a new version with the world's first configurable "body scan" will be released shortly).

It uses what he calls a "cognitive shuffle," or Serial Diverse Imagining (SDI), a method that essentially "scrambles" one's thoughts and keeps the mind off issues that may prevent sleep. "A racing mind, worries and uncontrollable thoughts are common bedtime complaints among poor sleepers," Beaudoin notes.

He and colleagues tested the method among 154 university students who complained of excessive cognitive pre-sleep arousal. The study employed SDI tasks, which occur at bedtime, and also used a standard treatment of structured problem solving (SP), which is done prior to bedtime and takes about 15 minutes. They found SDI to be as effective in reducing pre-sleep arousal, sleep effort and poor sleep quality - with the added advantage of being done while in bed.

However SDI is not without its challenges. "The human brain is a 'meaning maker' or a sense-making machine," says Beaudoin. "It is actually very difficult for people to conjure up random images unaided. However according to my theory, while it may be difficult to engage in SDI, it is not only a consequence of [sleep](#) onset; SDI facilitates it."

While one solution is Beaudoin's app, he has also invented a "do-it-yourself" version of SDI. The technique provides a sequence of letters that cue a series of relatively unrelated words, which could potentially be customized to individuals. "My hope is that popular culture will absorb the notion that counting sheep is not effective, whereas SDI is," says Beaudoin.

He will present his research, titled [Serial diverse imagining task: A new remedy for bedtime complaints of worrying and other sleep-disruptive mental activity](#), at SLEEP 2016, a joint meeting of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the Sleep Research Society, in Denver, Colorado on June 14, 2016.

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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