

Managing Insomnia and Other Sleep Problems with CBT-I

Objective

To identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts and behaviors that contribute to insomnia and develop strategies to improve sleep.

What to Know

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is a type of therapy designed to help people who have trouble sleeping, especially those with insomnia. It works by addressing both the thoughts (cognitions) and behaviors that contribute to sleep problems.

Identifying Negative Thoughts. CBT-I helps you recognize and change unhelpful thoughts or worries that may keep you awake at night. Imagine you are lying awake in bed, unable to fall asleep, while plagued by the persistent thought, “I’ll never fall asleep.” This thought is an example of what CBT-I addresses. It is a recurring, distressing belief that can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more you dwell on this thought, the more anxious and frustrated you become, making it even harder to fall asleep. CBT-I helps you challenge and replace negative thoughts with more positive and realistic ones. Here's how it works.

- **Identification:** CBT-I encourages you to become aware of automatic sleep-related negative thoughts. These thoughts are often reflexive and based on fear or frustration.
- **Challenge:** Once identified, challenge the validity of these thoughts. Are they based on evidence or are they exaggerated and irrational?
- **Replacement:** After challenging the negative thoughts, you can develop more balanced, rational, and constructive thoughts. For instance, instead of thinking, “I’ll never fall asleep,” replace it with, “It’s normal to have occasional trouble falling asleep, and I have experienced restful nights before.”
- **Practice:** Practice new, positive thoughts regularly. The more you reinforce healthier thought patterns, the more they become your default response.
- **Stress Reduction:** Relaxation exercises and mindfulness can help calm the mind and reduce the anxiety that can accompany sleeplessness.

Changing Sleep Behaviors. Adjust your sleep-related behaviors by maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, limiting daytime napping, reducing late-day caffeine use, and creating a comfortable sleep environment. Avoid spending too much time in bed awake, which can reinforce insomnia.

Sleep Restriction. You may temporarily reduce the amount of time you spend in bed to match the actual amount of sleep you are getting. This helps improve the quality of your sleep and strengthens the association between your bed and sleep.

Relaxation Techniques. Relaxation exercises like deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation to calm your mind and body before bedtime are important elements of treatment.

In simple terms, CBT-I helps you change the way you think about sleep and adjust your habits to promote better sleep. It is a structured approach that aims to break the cycle of insomnia by addressing the underlying thoughts and behaviors that contribute to sleep problems.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

What thoughts do you typically have when you cannot sleep?

What evidence supports these thoughts?

What evidence contradicts these thoughts?

Now, generate more balanced, rational thoughts to replace the problematic thoughts.

Dedicate a notebook or journal as your “sleep record.” Each day for one week write down the following information:

- Situation/Trigger (What led to your difficulty sleeping?)
- Emotion (How did you feel during this time?)
- Automatic Thoughts (What thoughts were running through your mind?)

Sleep Log

Record your sleep patterns for one week.

Date	Bedtime	Wake Time	Time to Fall Asleep	Total Sleep Time
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				
Total				

Sleep Efficiency (Total Sleep Time / Total Time in Bed): _____%

Bedroom Environment

Make sure your bedroom is sleep-friendly. Note the following information in your notebook or journal.

- Temperature: _____°C/°F
- Light (too much/too little)
- Noise (too much/too little)
- Comfortable Mattress/Pillow (Yes/No)
- Distractions (Yes/No)

Sleep Hygiene

Identify and rate your sleep hygiene practices on a scale from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent).

Regular Sleep Schedule _____

Limit Caffeine/Alcohol Before Bed _____

Avoid Heavy Meals Before Bed _____

Regular Exercise _____

Limit Screen Time Before Bed _____

Relaxation Techniques _____

Limit Naps _____

Comfortable Bedding _____

What changes can you make based on the above ratings?

Relaxation Techniques

Choose one relaxation technique to practice every night for at least ten minutes before bedtime.

- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** – Tense and then relax each muscle group in your body, starting from your toes and working up to your head.
- **Deep Breathing** – Inhale slowly for a count of 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4. Repeat for 5-10 minutes.
- **Guided Imagery** – Imagine a calming, peaceful scene and focus on the sensory details. You may use a YouTube video with music to help you relax.

What are some other ways you can relax before bed?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

After practicing these activities for one week, did your sleep improve? Why or why not?

What else can you do to get a better night's sleep? Be specific.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
