

# Sleep Management in Parkinson's

## Booklet 4

### Thinking about Sleep



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## Sleep Management in Parkinson's

So far we have focussed mainly on changing your sleep habits. In addition to our habits, our thoughts and beliefs can also affect our sleep. Certain ways of thinking can increase mental arousal, making it harder for us to switch off and go to sleep. And certain beliefs about sleep can be mistaken, leading to unnecessary feelings of anxiety or disappointment.

The aim of this booklet is to help you to recognise how some ways of thinking can feed into the vicious circle of insomnia, while alternative ways of thinking can contribute to good sleep.

### Thinking about Sleep

#### How thoughts and beliefs can feed the vicious circle of insomnia

**Thinking in bed** When people cannot get to sleep they often find themselves lying in bed thinking. At first it doesn't really matter whether these thoughts are happy, sad or neutral, what makes them unhelpful is that they are difficult to stop. The problem here is that thinking is a type of arousal, and can keep us awake. Even worse, sooner or later these thoughts can lead to worry or anxiety - feelings which can make it even more difficult to get to sleep. Sometimes when people cannot get to sleep they worry about general things like their health or their family. However, it is also common for people to worry about how lack of sleep will affect them the next day. Either way, thinking and worrying will keep you awake.

**Beliefs about sleep** How we feel about events is closely related to what we know and believe about them. If, for example, we believe that we **must** get at least 7 hours sleep every night in order to function properly, then not being able to get to sleep might make us feel anxious. Or, if we believe that we can't do **anything** properly after a poor night's sleep, then periods of sleeplessness will make us feel annoyed or even angry. In both cases, the resulting feelings will make things worse by keeping us awake. If, on the other hand, we can change our beliefs, then we can take these unhelpful feelings away.

**Trying harder to get to sleep** When people have a persistent problem with insomnia symptoms, they often try harder to sleep. Unfortunately, 'trying' to get to sleep just makes things worse. Sleep, for most people, is automatic, it does not require effort. People who don't have sleep problems don't **try** to sleep, it just comes naturally. So 'trying harder' to sleep is nearly always unsuccessful and, since it doesn't work, it can make us feel frustrated or even angry.

Getting to sleep requires a tranquil state of mind. Worry, anger and effort are among the worst enemies of sleep, since they always result in arousal. Mostly, these feelings arise from the way we think, and the things we believe. It follows, then, that getting some control over thoughts and beliefs can play an important part in the self management of insomnia symptoms. This booklet provides information and advice which should influence the way you think about your sleep. The aim is to help you to put your sleep problem into perspective and, as a result, to avoid unnecessary worry.

## **Thinking about Sleep: Advice**

### **1 Keep your expectations realistic**

Many people believe that 8 hours sleep is essential if they are to feel refreshed and function well during the day. There is also a tendency to compare our sleep now to how it used to be, and to wish it had stayed the same. And most people wish they could wake up in the morning feeling completely refreshed and full of energy. Unfortunately these expectations are, for the most part, unrealistic.

In reality, sleep varies widely among individuals. Some adults may naturally sleep around 8 hours per night – but most don't. In addition, we tend to sleep less as we get older and with long term health conditions, so how much sleep we need will also depend upon age and stage of Parkinson's. In general, 'normal' adult sleep durations can be anywhere between 5 and 10 hours per night. There is no 'set' amount of sleep that people need. Similarly, some people take longer to get to sleep than others, and some people wake up in the night more often than others. These variations are completely normal.

If you have a bed partner, or sleep in the same room, it is very likely that you will have different sleep patterns, it does not mean that you have abnormal sleep. Your sleep pattern may vary more as a result of Parkinson's. Keep in mind that sleep patterns vary from person to person, and can vary for the same person on different nights. Avoid comparing your sleep pattern with that of others; there will always be someone who sleeps better than you.

**Keep your expectations realistic; sleep patterns vary from person to person.**

### **2 Try not to blame sleeplessness for all your problems**

It is quite natural for people to be concerned about the effects of poor sleep on their day to day activities. For example, people with insomnia may say:

"When I sleep poorly, I can hardly function the next day."

or

"When I feel irritable or tense during the day, it's because I haven't slept well the night before."

or

"I'm just not myself after a really poor night."

In each case, the underlying assumption is that poor sleep always affects our efficiency, our mood, and our health the next day. However, while poor sleep clearly can affect how we feel the next day, its effects are a bit more complex than many people think. Mood is commonly affected after a poor night's sleep, making us more irritable, worried, or sad. These feelings can then alter our perception of how we perform the next day.

For example, while many people with insomnia report feeling tired and non-productive after a night of poor sleep, most are found to perform just as well as good sleepers. In fact, the majority of people with insomnia find they actually function better than they think.

One of the reasons for this is that your expectations can play tricks on you. If, after a poor night's sleep you are convinced that you won't be able to concentrate or accomplish much that day, it is quite likely that you will be less productive. If on the other hand, you avoid thinking about your night's sleep, you may find yourself functioning surprisingly well.

It is easy to blame insomnia for all the things that go wrong during the day. However, it may not be the only culprit. It is possible that other factors can explain these difficulties. For example, stress in other areas of your life can also interfere with your ability to concentrate and affect your overall daytime functioning. Of course, you should not deny the presence of unpleasant effects related to insomnia. But if you blame insomnia for all the difficulties experienced during the day, you just increase the pressure on yourself to get a better night's sleep.

**All sorts of things can result in a low mood, less energy, and poor daytime performance. Be careful: don't blame it all on insomnia.**

### **3 Understand the causes of insomnia**

Trying to understand the 'cause' of a problem is often a useful first step towards solving it. However, where sleep problems are concerned, finding the original 'cause' of your insomnia symptoms may not help. As we explained in Booklet 1, once insomnia gets established, it's the 'perpetuating factors' which keep it going. The original cause may now be absent, or its impact on your sleep may be reduced, but it may leave you with chronic insomnia symptoms. For this reason, it doesn't make much sense to focus too much on original 'causes', since these may be unchangeable. But that doesn't mean that your sleep problem is unchangeable.

Most people with sleep difficulties have ideas about what caused their problem. But dwelling on unchangeable causes can lead to a sense of helplessness and feelings of being a victim of insomnia. Instead, it is far more realistic to focus on the things you CAN change, like the factors which keep your insomnia going. You now need to distinguish the cause of your sleep problem from the perpetuating factors – the factors which keep insomnia going.

**Those things which keep insomnia going CAN be changed – even if the original cause of your insomnia can't.**

#### **4 Avoid 'trying' to sleep**

It is an interesting fact that people with insomnia tend to spend longer in bed than people who sleep well. Generally, this is because people with insomnia are trying to 'make up' for lost sleep – they are TRYING to sleep.

It is not unusual to hear comments like:

"When I have trouble sleeping, I should just stay in bed and try harder" or "If I try hard enough, sleep will eventually come."

But trying to get to sleep is one of the worst mistakes people with insomnia can make. This is because sleep cannot be achieved 'on command'. While it is possible to control factors and attitudes that encourage good sleep, it is not possible to control sleep itself. Whenever you try too hard to control something that should be automatic (remember, we used the example of walking down stairs in booklet 1), the attempt can often 'backfire', making things worse. Trying can only get in the way of falling asleep.

**Sleep should be automatic so don't get in the way; never try to fall asleep.**

#### **5 Try not to exaggerate the effects of poor sleep.**

Sometimes, worrying can make everything worse. Like a chain reaction, worrying about sleep during the day can lead to concern in the evening, then anxiety at bedtime, and finally a disturbed night's sleep. One way to avoid this 'chain reaction' is to place your sleep problem in a proper perspective. By all means, accept that disturbed sleep can make life difficult (and sometimes, very difficult), but don't let your worry exaggerate the effects of each poor night. Take control.

Even if you have been awake for hours, don't make matters worse by imagining disastrous consequences. Instead, ask yourself: "What's the worst thing that can happen if I never get to sleep tonight?" A sensible answer to this question would be: "I'll be sleepy, but I'll deal with it tomorrow." Remember, then, the worst thing that can happen after a bad night's sleep is that you will feel sleepy. This you can deal with the following day.

Again, we do understand that this advice may appear difficult. After all, it's quite natural, when lying awake, to worry about things. But a change in the way you think during periods of sleeplessness can deliver benefits both to you and your sleep.

**Insomnia is bad enough; don't make it worse by exaggerating the effects of poor sleep.**

## **6 Develop some tolerance to the effects of sleep loss**

If you are following this self help programme, then you will already have made some changes to your daily routines. You can also help by changing the way you respond to poor sleep. Instead of dwelling on insomnia and its effects on your life, try to develop a more positive attitude to sleep loss. After a poor night, try to stick to your routines and usual activities. This may not be easy, but if you try, at least it will shift your attention away from sleeplessness. If completing all your daily routines is 'too much', set yourself a goal of always completing some. Doing this can show you that daytime functioning is not entirely dependent on the previous night's sleep. Another strategy is to change your routine to make the day easier to handle. This does not mean cancelling activities, but rather reorganising things in order to make them easier for you. For example, if you must carry out more demanding tasks, do them at a time of day when your ability to perform is at its best.

**Try to keep to your routines, even after a poor night.**

## **In conclusion**

We all have beliefs and expectations concerning sleep. Some of these are unhelpful and feed the vicious circle of insomnia. With time and effort, you can change your beliefs and attitudes and, by doing so, improve your sleep. The goal here is to encourage you to develop different ways of seeing things and new ways of thinking.

**That's the end of the fourth booklet. In the next booklet we will consider how sleeping tablets affect sleep, and how to avoid some of the problems associated with these medicines.**

# Thinking about Sleep: Advice

<b>1</b>	<b>Keep your expectations realistic; sleep patterns vary from person to person.</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>All sorts of things can result in a low mood, less energy, and poor daytime performance. Be careful: don't blame it all on insomnia.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Those things which keep insomnia going CAN be changed – even if the original cause of your insomnia can't.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Sleep should be automatic so don't get in the way; never <u>try</u> to fall asleep.</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Insomnia is bad enough; don't make it worse by exaggerating the effects of poor sleep.</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Develop some tolerance to the effects of disturbed sleep. Try to keep to your routines, even after a poor night.</b>



