

# JUST THE FACTS: Sleep

## How Thinking Affects Sleep

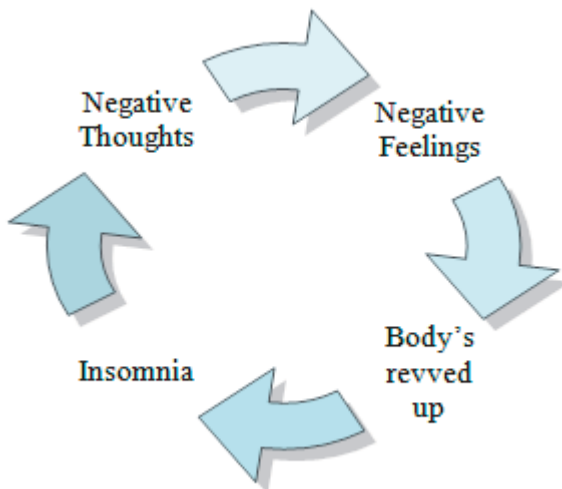
### Negative Thoughts about Sleep

Medical conditions and stressful life events can interfere with sleep. Negative thinking about sleep can also keep a sleep pattern from getting back to normal. Luckily, it's possible to change negative thinking by using a technique called **thought reframing**.

Here's a simple fact: thoughts affect how we feel and how we behave. And negative thoughts about sleep can contribute to frustration and stress. Let's look at how *thoughts about sleep* can lead to sleep problems.

As Gavin was getting ready for bed he kept thinking to himself, "I didn't sleep at all last night, so tonight I need to get eight hours of sleep or else I'm going to be in a horrible mood all day tomorrow." Gavin's negative thinking is making it more difficult for him to go to sleep because he keeps worrying about his sleep. Worrying gets in the way of getting a good night's sleep.

Stress makes it harder to sleep because the mind and the body are revved up and ready for action. The results can be unhelpful: lying in bed wide awake, having negative thoughts about sleep, and feeling frustrated because falling asleep isn't happening. The body reacts to the negative thoughts and the feelings of frustration. The heart starts racing, muscles become tense, and a headache kicks in. The physical discomfort creates more worrying, which causes restlessness, and falling asleep becomes even more difficult. So, negative thoughts at bedtime set off a negative cycle that can lead to insomnia.



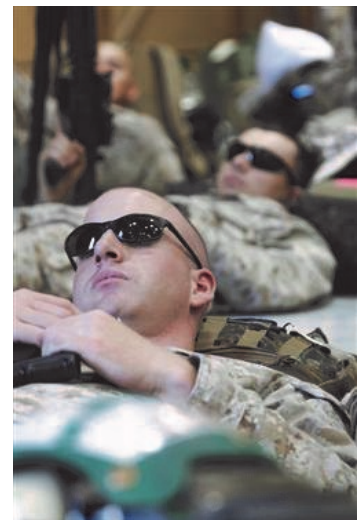
There are three important things to remember about negative thoughts:

1. Negative thoughts tend to pop up out of the blue. A person doesn't try to think them; they just seem to appear automatically.
2. Negative thoughts are often unrealistic and rarely helpful. They often distort or twist facts, making things seem worse than they really are.

3. Since thoughts are *learned*, they can be *unlearned*. It's possible to improve sleep by learning new, healthier ways to think. Changing one's negative thoughts about sleep may take some effort but it's worth it!

Additionally, negative thoughts often center on three ideas:

1. "I am the cause of \_\_\_\_\_ (bad event)."
  - For example, "I failed the training because I'm not good enough." Or, "I caused all the bad things in my life."
2. One bad thing means everything is bad.
  - For example, "I failed my training and so my whole life sucks." Or, "My girlfriend broke up with me, so all women are losers."
3. Things will always be bad.
  - For example, "I failed my training so my future is hopeless." Or, "This is never going to get better."



### Changing Negative Thoughts about Sleep

*Thought reframing* can help to change negative thoughts about sleep. Thought reframing provides greater control by helping you identify negative sleep thoughts and replace them with accurate and positive sleep thoughts.

There are three steps to thought reframing.

1. Learn about sleep in order to have more accurate and positive thoughts about sleep. Be sure that what you know about sleep fits the facts.

2. Keep a log. Write down negative thoughts about sleep at bedtime, during the night if awakened, and after getting out of bed in the morning. Take a look at the list of thoughts and see how they're negative and inaccurate. This will help you get into the habit of noticing and taking action against negative thoughts as soon as they arise.

Your thoughts are negative if you ...

- Focus only on thinking about your problems.
- Make things seem worse than they really are.
- Tend to over-generalize.
- Tend to jump to conclusions.
- Reject anything that's positive.
- Tend to label yourself based on mistakes you've made.
- Think about what you "should've" done.

1 Jacobs, Gregg D. Say Good Night to Insomnia. New York: Henry Holt and company, LLC, 1998.

3. Replace negative thoughts with more accurate and positive thoughts.

- Make a list of accurate thoughts about sleep. Some examples are: "I will have a good, restful night's sleep." "I have survived sleepless nights before and I will again." "My sleep will get better if I keep working on it." "Sleep or no sleep, I will get through the day."
- Because negative thoughts are often unrealistic, write down a more realistic thought for each negative thought you have. The more you do this, the easier it will become to replace negative thoughts with positive ones, leading to better sleep.
- When you find yourself thinking negative thoughts, replace them by thinking to yourself the more accurate and realistic thoughts from your list. For example, if you think, "I never get good sleep," this is very likely to be an inaccurate thought, because the key word "never" is an example of all-or-nothing thinking. Replace this negative thought with a more accurate one, something like, "I've had good sleep in the past and although I'm having some difficulty now, I just have to practice good sleep habits in order to get good sleep again." Or if you think, "Nothing is going to help me sleep," replace it with a more accurate thought such as, "Giving up easily won't help me sleep. I need to practice good sleep habits that will help me sleep."



**Remember:**  
sleep doesn't  
get better by  
trying harder.

**There are two  
things that  
people can do  
to help their  
Sleep:  
change sleep  
habits and  
Replace.  
Negative  
Thoughts  
about sleep  
with more  
accurate  
thoughts.**

**Daily practice  
will result in  
better sleep. If  
you miss a few  
days of  
Practicing,  
don't give up  
hope and don't  
be hard on  
yourself. Just  
pick up where  
you left off and  
keep working  
at it.**