

How to improve your sleep when suffering from Parasomnias (unusual behaviour during sleep time)

Parasomnias include but are not limited to: sleep walking, sleep talking, night terrors, sleep paralysis, nightmares, sleep eating, dream enactment... the list goes on.

We go through cycles of sleep at night. These unusual behaviours occur when the normal cycles are disturbed. There are a number of ways sleep stages can be interrupted – some less obvious than others, but careful attention to sleep can have helpful effects on what might seem an uncontrollable problem:

- 1. Try to keep the times and durations of sleep the same.** This doesn't mean you have to stick to them without fail, and you should not take yourself to bed when you are not sleepy - but the more erratic your sleep timings, the more likely your sleep is to be interrupted by unusual behaviours.
- 2. Try not to nap during the day** (*unless you have been diagnosed with narcolepsy*). Although the odd nap will not harm your sleep, regular naps will worsen your night time sleep, increasing the risk of parasomnias. If you are short of sleep, try to catch up during the following night, not during the day.
- 3. Avoid sleep deprivation.** It's very common for people with sleep problems to fear bed time, and therefore avoid it, despite nodding off and feeling very sleepy. Unfortunately, any unusual behaviours at night are only made worse by avoiding sleep. Therefore it is important to avoid a vicious cycle of sleep avoidance and worsening sleep deprivation.
- 4. Wake up at a similar time every day.** This may sound strict, but our bodies were designed to wake up to a natural internal clock at around the same time each day. When your body achieves this, we wake up feeling ready to start the day. When wake up times are irregular, we tend to feel groggy, low and unrefreshed. Most importantly, waking up at similar times is pivotal to avoid sleep deprivation and maintain a strong drive to sleep at the appropriate times and with minimal interruption.
- 5. Learn to come back to balance during the day.** Our brains are pretty smart, and if we are stressed and anxious during the day and don't deal with this properly then, our brains have to work harder and process at night. This can lead to all sorts of interruptions in your sleep cycles leading to those unwanted and unusual behaviours. It only takes 1 minute to break through stress and anxiety type thoughts and symptoms. Find something that suits you such as a breathing technique, taking a small walk outside, listening to a relaxation audio * – just interrupt the negative feelings to bring yourself back to balance with some sort of break regularly. You don't need to become a yogi or mindfulness master, just to dedicate 1 minute!
- 6. Avoid depressants and stimulants.** Caffeine and alcohol and medications which can alter your mood and heart rate also tend to interrupt the way our sleep works – our sleep cycles. Try to avoid anything you don't need to take. If you have been prescribed something that you take before bed, make

sure you are consistent with timings and dosages, and that the benefits outweigh any cost to sleep. If need be, discuss this with your prescribing doctor.

7. **Make sure that noise, light and comfort settings in your environment are ok.**

Unusual behaviours in your own sleep can be triggered by things happening in your environment. These include a noisy road, a snoring partner, an uncomfortable bed, and too much light preventing your brain from shutting down completely. Even when these things do not wake you up fully, they may interrupt your sleep enough to trigger those unusual behaviours.

With each point, it takes time to see changes, so try and keep going.

Lack of consistency in any of our behaviour, emotional state and environment can all affect how we sleep. You don't have to be so strict and diligent that it becomes stressful and anxiety-inducing to perform these techniques, just consistent enough that you do them most of the time. How about looking for one thing to work on for now, and go from there. It's about balance!

* for a free relaxing audio you can use visit:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-384807935/imagery-technique-whisper-asmr>

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