

Sleep Restriction Therapy

What is Sleep Restriction Therapy?

Sleep restriction therapy is a behavioral treatment for insomnia that works to decrease variability in the timing of sleep while increasing the depth of sleep. The goal is to shorten the amount of time spent in bed in order to consolidate sleep.

Sleep Restriction Therapy: the good news and the bad news

- The good news is that it works. Research has shown that sleep restriction therapy is the most effective sleep hygiene technique available. It works as well as medication with a longer-lasting effect.
- The bad news is that it takes several weeks of diligent dedication to altering your sleep schedule in order to see results. You may feel sleepier and experience more disrupted sleep initially. Stick with it and your insomnia will improve.



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Sleep Restriction therapy instructions:

Step 1: Determine your allowed Time in Bed. Begin by staying in bed for only the average amount of time you are actually currently sleeping. This can be calculated by keeping a sleep log for two weeks. Total up the average number of hours you slept each night and this is your Average Total Sleep Time (ATST). Add 30 minutes to your ATST. This may mean that you are only allowed to stay in bed for 5 hours a night.

Time in Bed = Average Total Sleep Time + 30 minutes

Step 2: Set a wake time. Wake up at the same time EVERY morning no matter how much sleep you got the night before.

Step 3: Set a bed time. Your bed time is determined by counting back from your wake time the amount of Time in Bed you were allowed in Step 1. For example, if your Time in Bed is 6 hours and you have set your wake time to 6 am, your Bed Time is 12 midnight. You should not get into bed before midnight even if you are sleepy and think you could fall asleep.

Step 4: Stick to this sleep schedule as closely as possible for at least two weeks. If you are sleeping relatively well for most nights and you feel good during the day, keep this sleep schedule. If you are feeling tired during the day, add another 15 minutes to your Time in Bed. You can increase the Time in Bed by 15 minutes per week until you are sleeping better at night and feel good during the day.

Step 5: Use bright light in the morning and dim the lights in the evening. Bright light is the most powerful controller of the sleep wake cycle. Using light will help retune a normal sleep/wake pattern, and trying sleep restriction therapy without bright light is not nearly as successful. Using light for 30 minutes upon awakening is sufficient to regulate the sleep/wake cycle. You can go outside into natural sunlight or purchase a light box.

Step 5: Avoid napping. This will decrease night time sleep drive.

Step 6: Practice good sleep hygiene. Please refer to the Sleep Hygiene Guidelines and Sleep Improvement Guidelines.

A Cautionary Note:

It is suggested that you begin by spending a minimum of 5.5 hours in bed, regardless of how long you think you sleep, so that job performance does not suffer too much and you are able to function during the day. If you have significant difficulty staying awake, do not attempt this method. It is not for everyone.

Sleep Restriction Therapy for Insomnia

“True silence is the rest of the mind, and is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.”

William Penn

