

YOU & Improved

Health, heart, happiness – how to supersize your life

SLEEP TIGHT



MISCHA BARTON

Top tips to help you nod off

Mischa Barton's recent revelation that she's suffered from insomnia for years got us thinking about sleep. Or the lack of it. It turns out 51.3 per cent of us have trouble sleeping. 'In today's society it can feel impossible to switch off,' says Jo Usmar, co-author of *This Book Will Make You Sleep*. 'We come home to emails, Tweets and TV shows. When your mind is stimulated, you physically can't drop off.' Here are Jo's tips for winning the sleep battle.



EMBRACE YOUR DARK SIDE

The sleep hormone melatonin is released naturally when it gets dark. Blue light released by most bulbs will actively inhibit melatonin, so consider swapping conventional light switches for dimmers (to dim the light gradually in the evening), get an alarm clock that emits red light rather than blue and invest in blackout curtains and an eye mask.

DON'T CLOCK WATCH

Counting down how long you have left to sleep ('I'll get two hours if I fall asleep now...') will make you panic. Your body will tense up and your mind will reel ('How will I cope tomorrow?') making you physically unable to sleep. Turn your

clock around and don't look at it. If you do wake up, tell yourself it's 3am. Your brain will accept this hour without panicking because although it's late, you'll still be able to get a few hours of sleep before having to get up.

KEEP A ROUTINE

Create a simple sleep routine by going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day for a couple of weeks (yep, even on weekends). Your body will start expecting sleep at regular hours.

DON'T CANCEL PLANS

Try not to cancel plans no matter how shattered you are. Cancelling will make you fixated on the issue of sleep ('Being tired is ruining my life'), which will stress you out.

PRACTISE THOUGHT BLOCKING

If you're lying in bed fretting, think of a word that has no emotional connotations (try sheep!) then repeat it slowly over and over in your head, once every two seconds, keeping your eyes closed. Keep at it for quite a long time – try about three to five minutes – until your worries have retreated to a dusty corner of your brain.

TURN DOWN THE HEAT

Cold conditions are more conducive to sleep than hot ones. Your core body temperature drops when you sleep so hiking it up again will only wake you up.



This Book Will Make You Sleep by Dr Jessamy Hibberd and Jo Usmar (£7.99, Quercus) is out now