

A woman with long brown hair is lying on her side in a lush green forest, resting her head on a white pillow. She is wearing a black dress with a white floral pattern. The forest floor is covered in ferns and other green plants. The background is filled with more ferns and trees, creating a dense, natural setting.

The one-hour sleep solution

Can't sleep? Wellington therapist Charlotte Hinksman reckons she can transform you from a wide-awake zombie to a sweet dreamer overnight

AS JUSTINE AUTON WAKES, revived after a good night's sleep and looking forward to the day, you'd be forgiven for thinking she's found the perfect balance. But it wasn't always this way. Until recently, Justine had a sleep problem she just couldn't fix. Falling asleep wasn't a problem, but staying asleep was. Every night she'd wake up after three hours and lie there, aware of time ticking away and worrying about the next day.

The physical and emotional impact began to show. "I was feeling tired, grumpy and annoyed," says Justine. "I knew that I needed to be firing on all cylinders and I wasn't."

After three years of trying everything – natural remedies, diet, exercise and relaxation – she began to feel out of control. When she dangerously went against a pharmacist's advice and attempted to take a strictly short-term remedy over the long term, she realised how desperate she was for a real solution.

If this sounds familiar, it's no surprise. It's estimated all of us will have difficulty sleeping at some point. In a recent national survey by the Sleep/Wake Centre at Massey University, 27 per cent of adults reported a current sleep problem and 25 per cent a chronic sleep problem. Symptoms included difficulty falling asleep, waking more than three times per night, difficulty getting back to sleep after waking, waking too early or waking unrefreshed.

Sleep disorders should not be ignored, says Karyn O'Keeffe, registered sleep physiologist and research fellow at the centre. "Sleep deprivation affects everything from work to family relationships to how you function and feel. It can also increase the chance of workplace errors and motor vehicle accidents."

So why is it that so many of us don't manage to get good sleep and what can we do about it? As a therapist, I help people using Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), a kind of psychology that tries to change connections in the brain and nervous system by talking and using special techniques in a relaxed context. It's known as 'brief therapy' because thoughts, emotions, physiology and behaviour can be changed in a relatively short time.

Justine found out about NLP through a friend. She didn't expect it to solve her problem, and was surprised and delighted to discover that a single one-hour session resulted in sound sleep straight away. "After the session, I felt different and was looking forward to going to bed to see what would happen.

The next thing I knew the alarm went off. I realised I'd slept through the night. It happened the next night, and the next, and that was it!

"NLP really does feel miraculous. It's hard to explain; we all know our minds are powerful, but having your brain help fix itself – it's stunning."

Many of my clients are women. Some have had difficulty sleeping their whole lives. Others began to have trouble sleeping after a traumatic event or after they had kids. Although each case is unique, it boils down to one thing – we think too much.

Our mind and body are connected and it's important to know that your nervous system can't tell the difference between what's real and what's imagined – it simply responds to your thoughts. So when you're in bed mulling over the past or imagining the future, you're sending a message that says, "Pay attention, wake up!" The result is a confused system that doesn't realise it's time to rest.

Instead, we need to encourage the calm state needed for sleep. We can do this by sending our nervous system messages to make the boundaries clear. It's also important to minimise brain activity. Start by giving yourself permission to turn off at the end of the day. Tell yourself, "I've done everything I can today, and trust myself to do everything tomorrow," and let go.

For more information about NLP visit www.charlottehinksmann.com and www.nzanlp.org.nz. →



ABOVE: Now that her sleep patterns are back on track, Justine says her quality of life has greatly improved and she has renewed energy, vitality and clarity.

The five-step NLP-based plan to getting good sleep

If a good night's sleep is important to you, commit to this plan diligently for seven nights. It should reverse any sleep problems within that time, so try to enjoy it – it's change in action. If your sleep problem persists after a week, see a professional for further advice.

1 Use your waking hours effectively

- Write a list of all your worries, then write down a solution for each one.
- Make a to-do list and prioritise it; do the most important things first.
- Allocate a specific time in your day to do this so it doesn't impede on your rest time.

2 Make your bedtime and wake time consistent

- Decide how many hours of sleep you need and the time you need to get up. Work backwards to calculate your bedtime. Make sure your lights are out at this time every night.
- Rise at the same time every morning, whether you feel you got enough sleep or not.
- Include weekends – remember it's a short-term sacrifice for a lifetime of sleep.

3 Establish a wind-down routine

- Say goodnight to the members of your household and stop all TV, caffeine, alcohol, snacks and any other stimulation 30-60 minutes before bedtime. Begin a relaxing routine. Start by having a hot bath, reading, doing a 10-minute meditation or listening to relaxing music – anything to clear your mind and relax your body.
- Do this every night.

4 Support your nervous system with herbs

- Buy a good-quality sleep-blend herbal tea to relax your nervous system.
- Drink this at the same time every night and only at this time (either within the wind-down period or before, depending on your bladder sensitivity).

5 Make your bedroom somewhere you love

- Clear your bedroom of anything that could trigger unsettling thoughts or stress – bills, work, the clock. If it stresses you, get rid of it.
- Keep the room clean and fill it with things that are pleasant and comfortable.
- Burn some lavender oil in a burner during wind-down (remember to extinguish the candle before bed).
- Never get into heated discussions or arguments in your bedroom – save them for another place at another time.



ABOVE: After 10 years of sleepless nights, a revitalised Julie sleeps soundly after NLP provided a permanent solution.

Julie's story

Julie Tsui juggles the pressures of a demanding job, sporting and social life with plenty of time to relax and sleep soundly. She's come a long way. Insomnia affected her for over 10 years – anxiety, stress, sensitivity to light and noise, and an overactive mind contributing factors. Julie's rock bottom was an episode triggered by a relationship break-up when, having not slept at all for two weeks, she accidentally flooded her apartment.

Although Julie was uncomfortable with her reliance on sleeping pills, they did provide relief – until they stopped working. The slow-release dose left her groggy in the morning and the light dose rendered her wide awake in the middle of the night. When attempting natural sleep she would rise unrefreshed, certain she hadn't slept at all.

Hypnosis and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) helped, but the problem persisted. Julie began to think it was something she would just have to deal with forever. It was a frustrating cycle that left her little energy with which to enjoy life.

Her new GP, aware that sleeping pills were only a short-term solution, suggested NLP. Although initially sceptical, Julie was amazed to find that after one session she was sleeping soundly without drugs and, unexpectedly, without her earplugs or eye mask. "I'm still amazed, it really has changed my life," she says. "I no longer think of sleep as the enemy and actually look forward to bedtime."

Reaping the benefits of being healthy and mentally alert, Julie thoroughly recommends the experience. "I'm so happy that I found a permanent solution." ■