

# you really need?



Picture: CORBIS posed by model

## Lavender, silk ...and turn off the TV

**ROOM TEMPERATURE:** The ideal temperature is 18c, according to Chris Idzikowski from the Edinburgh Sleep Clinic. This will ensure your body's core temperature drops enough to encourage sleep. If the room is too warm (above 24c) your brain won't send the correct triggers for sleep. If the room is too cold (below 12c), the body will struggle to maintain temperature and disturb sleep.

**DUVET:** Have both a summer and a winter duvet. A 10-13.5 tog winter duvet will be far too warm for the summer months, when a 4.5 tog is ideal.

**VENTILATION:** Always have an open window, even in winter. Fresh air encourages sleep.

**YOUR BED:** Don't scrimp — this is where you will spend 25 years of your life. The typical person sweats half a pint of liquid during the night and changes position 40-60 times. Dr Neil Stanley, from the British Sleep Society, recommends choosing a good, supportive bed base with a

firm, thick mattress. Your mattress should be changed every 12 years and a futon should be kept for a maximum of three years.

**BED LINEN:** Cotton and linen are best as they absorb more moisture.

**LAVENDER:** You could sprinkle a tiny amount of lavender oil on your pillow or spray some in the air. Extensive research shows it can improve the quality of sleep by 20 per cent.

**NIGHTWEAR:** Loose and made of natural fibres. Bed socks are a good idea as warm feet signal healthy blood flow to the brain, inducing restful sleep.

**ALARM CLOCK:** Turn it down or preferably off. Dr Neil Stanley says: 'Anticipating a shrill alarm clock is stressful and will make insomnia worse.'

**CURTAINS/BLINDS:** As thick and heavy as possible. Ideally, a bedroom should be totally dark until 4am for optimum sleep. Darkness stimulates the pineal gland to produce the hormone melatonin, which

induces sleep. Switch off your landing light, too — even low levels of light under a door can keep you awake.

**TELEVISION:** Don't have one in the bedroom. 'It should be a haven of tranquillity,' says Dr Stanley. 'When you walk in, your mind must get the message that this is the place for sleep.'

**PARTNER:** If your other half is a fidget or a snorer, consider separate beds. Dr Stanley says: 'People who have poor sleep have higher rates of divorce and separate beds can improve, not ruin a sex life.'

**WARM BATH:** This will soothe you and relax your muscles, but avoid showering as this will wake you up.

**AVOID ALCOHOL:** Alcohol encourages the production of norepinephrine, a hormone-like neurotransmitter secreted in response to excitement and stress. Hours after drinking, a burst of norepinephrine can disrupt your sleep and is likely to wake you earlier than usual.

## Diary of an insomniac

JOY PERSAUD, 39, a journalist from Twickenham, South-West London, spent years fighting insomnia. Here, she describes the effect it had on her life...

**MY SLEEP** problems began seven years ago when I had a bullying boss. My body reacted to her ongoing attempts to intimidate me by pumping adrenaline into my system — morning, noon and night — and my ability to sleep well flew out the window. One morning, after five hours' fitful sleep, I had enough and quit, vowing to turn my life around.

### September 2002

**BOLSTERED** by freedom from the bully boss, I became a freelance writer. But my sleep patterns had been wrecked and I never got more than five hours' sleep.

### February 2003

**SIMON**, my husband, sleeps like a log and commented on how I always need to catch up on my sleep every weekend. I suspected that most people had a bit of a catch-up after a hard week's work, so didn't worry.

### April 2004

**SIMON'S** mother invited us to stay at her house in Devon. Being in the countryside made me drowsy, but I managed only five hours' broken



Ellen MacArthur survived on just two hours a night while sailing around the world

sleep and woke every day feeling wrung out. I worried that I came across as lazy.

### September 2005

**I SECURED** an assignment that involved travelling around the UK, covering thousands of miles in two weeks. By now, I was sleeping for no more than about three hours a night. I crashed into bed at the end of each day and cried, knowing I would feel as bad the following day.

### October 2006

**SIMON** and I flew to Turkey for a break. Every time Simon suggested we did an activity together I refused, snapping that I just wanted to relax. I'd tried warm baths, camomile tea, alcohol, over-the-counter sleeping pills, lavender on my pillow and exercise, but nothing worked.

### December 2006

**PARTIES** and dinners fell in a cluster and I was determined to go to all of them and damn the tiredness. By Christmas Day, I was ill with a nasty cold. We stayed at my parents', where I was miserable company.

### January 2007

**I VISITED** my GP to ask for sleeping pills, but he told me not to worry and said my body 'will take 90 per cent of what it needs' if I simply close my eyes, even if I remain awake. Later



Therapy: Joy Persaud is cured

that week, I nearly caused two car crashes in one day due to impaired judgment. Simon was horrified and recommended I see a sleep expert. We went to The London Sleep Centre, where I was wired up to electrodes that measure brain and muscle activity, breathing and heart rhythm.

### March 2007

**I WAS** diagnosed with stress-related bruxism (teeth grinding) and periodic limb movement (PLM) disorder. At last I'm being taken seriously.

### May 2007

**MY MEDICATION** — a muscle-relaxant and melatonin, a hormone that regulates the sleep cycle — worked after various adjustments of the dose. A psychotherapist drew up a strict sleep regime, which forbade lie-ins and naps, reducing my time in bed to seven hours a night. This would retrain my brain to crave sleep.

### June 2007

The medication made me sick and



Tony Blair ran the country on less than six hours

lose my appetite. Robbed of weekend lie-ins and naps to catch up on sleep, I almost walked into the path of a car. With these difficulties, the temptation to give up the regime was immense, but I persisted and after two months eventually slept for about five hours a night, then six.

### March 2008

**JUST** over a year since diagnosis, I started to come off the medication under medical supervision.

### October 2008

**MY SLEEP** is now immeasurably better, lasting on average seven hours a night. I feel wonderfully energised and alive when I have slept well, and don't doubt that sleep is key to a happy, healthy life.