



THE EFFORTLESSTM SLEEP METHOD

The Radical New Approach to Chronic Insomnia

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Sasha Stephens

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PREFACE

By Sasha Stephens, Bsc, MA,
creator of the Effortless Sleep Method, recovered insomniac

I understand

There is no need for you to tell me how bad your insomnia problem is.

I know

I know what you are going through. I *really* know what you are going through. I have experienced the full horror of chronic, long-term insomnia.

I know

I know the way that insomnia feels like a curse, a disease, an affliction which infects every part of your life. I know that it can take over your life, ruin your life, and ultimately *be* your life. I know the desperate, panicky, desolate, pitiful loneliness of lying awake at night and the living hell of going through day after day of work and social activities having not slept. I have wept, prayed, begged, raged, broken down, given up, and been left numb by insomnia.

I know

I have tried the herbs, the Valerian, the Passiflora, the 5HTP, the melatonin, the positive thinking, the wishful thinking, the antihistamines, the vitamin B complex, the zinc supplements, the turkey sandwiches, the exercise before breakfast, the exercise 6 hours before bed, the relaxation cds, the hypnosis, the sleeping pills, the sleep restriction, the milky drinks, the lavender pillows, the magnetic coils under my mattress, the crystals, the fan in the room, the ioniser in the room, the earplugs, the eye shades, and I've lost count of how many wild and wacky therapies and therapists. *So many therapists!*

I know

I have made silent pleas to God, offered up deals to the universe to exchange everything I own for the ability to sleep. I would have taken heroin if I thought it would make me sleep. I would have sold my soul to the devil if he had asked.

I know

In the deafening, screaming blackness of the sleepless night, I discovered that the fundamental state of the insomniac is one of profound *loneliness*. By night, insomnia separates you from the gently slumbering world of normal sleepers. By day it isolates you from the bustling world of active, happy people. Locked in a bubble of misery, the day of the sleep-deprived person is a semi-real nightmare – a half-life, a non-life.

As insomniacs we have two choices when it comes to normal, everyday work and social activities: we either complain to a largely non-understanding and sometimes unsympathetic social circle, *I didn't sleep well, I can't stay long, I don't think I'm up to that, sorry I'm not on top form today*. Or we learn to 'fake it' – to smile through the misery, to hide the secret truth *I feel like death, I don't want to be here, if you knew how tired I feel, why can't I feel like you do, why can't I enjoy life? What's wrong with me?*

Insomnia may seem almost to have a life of its own, an autonomous persona, or a self-sabotaging part of you over which you have no control; a monster, a possessing demon which taunts you by day and tortures you by night. This cruel tormentor judges you unworthy, undeserving of sleep and punishes you, over and over and over, night after night after night. A sadist, a bully: insomnia is ruthless...and relentless.

I feel your pain like no doctor or therapist, or well-meaning family member has ever done, I feel your pain like only a fellow insomniac can. Because I know how you have suffered, and how you still suffer, I want nothing more than to help you. It breaks my heart to hear about the appalling advice given to insomniacs, and the insensitive and downright negligent way in which they are sometimes treated by the medical profession; treatments which bring with them a whole plethora of new problems and which, unbelievably, often *make the sleeping worse*.

But now, my friend, *it stops here!* Your battle with insomnia is over. I am about to give you your life back. It is time to share with you, the gold – the treasure which took a decade and a half to discover. Using exactly the methods laid out in this book I kicked a **15 year** chronic insomnia problem and now sleep better than I did even as a child. Follow this programme, and you can turn your back on insomnia for good.

I will not disappoint...

...1...

GROUNDWORK

- CHAPTER ONE -

My Story

Introduction

First, an admission: I am not a professional author so please forgive me if my style and organisation skills leave a lot to be desired. Be patient: this book may not be eloquently written, but the advice given in it is pure gold. I may never write a bestseller, but I just may be able to give you your life back.

Over the years, my experience has led me to believe that it is only those who have suffered themselves who can really understand the particular psychology of chronic insomnia. So before I start teaching you how to get your life back, I want to spend a little while talking about the history of my sleeping problem. Reading about the experience of a fellow sufferer will assure you that what you feel, I have felt, what you suffer, I have suffered. But I do not do this in order that we can commiserate with each other; I do this so that you will believe that no matter how bad your problem is, *you can get better*. So, while you read my story of woe, hold this exciting thought in mind: *this person is now sleeping perfectly, effortlessly, every night!*

How It All Began

For twenty three years I had never really thought about sleep. Although even as a child I always took a fair while (up to an hour) to fall asleep, this fact had never really bothered me. Sleeping was something which happened every night, something I didn't question or wonder about, a part of my life like breathing or walking. Even in a strange bed, on a floor or in a tent it might take some time but eventually, I would always drop off.

Things only began to change when I went to university at the age of 23. This was a time of late night parties and numerous 'free days', all of which meant that for the first time since starting school (when I had regularly got up at 6.30am) I had no set waking up time. Years later I would find out that for many insomniacs, the problems begin at a time in life when they are keeping irregular hours. For example, during periods of self-employment, unemployment, or when at university. To make matters worse, on those 'free days' where I had no lectures, like the stereotypical student, I would often lie in until noon, 1pm or longer. This meant that on many days I was spending far too long in bed and in a sense, I was getting far *too much* sleep.

A second factor in the development of my insomnia came from my social life which at this time was a whirl of parties and fun events. In order to get a good night's sleep in preparation for one of these social engagements, the day before I would go to bed nice and early at 10.30 or 11pm. The problem was that I might have lain in bed 'til noon that day, so was going to bed only 9 hours after getting up! Not being remotely sleepy when I went to bed, combined with anticipation and excitement about the next day meant that I was taking hours and hours to fall asleep.

A Pattern Sets In

Soon I started to notice a pattern of not sleeping well before parties. This was worrying – feeling tired and tense was affecting my ability to enjoy myself. Before long, the same thing started happening before other fun events – weddings, Christmas, picnics, and days out in the country. Irritation soon turned to worry and I started not to be able to look forward to these events quite as much as I once had.

Then one night the whole thing took a turn for the worse. I remember lying in bed on one not particularly special or significant night when the thought flashed through my mind – “Wouldn't it be awful if I couldn't sleep well tonight, just like on those 'special' nights? In fact, what if I didn't sleep at all tonight?” This distressing idea actually began to wake me up. This idea turned to fear, and the further away sleep became. At that moment I noticed for the first time that worrying about not sleeping could keep me awake! And with that, my life

changed forever. That night was my first full sleepless night and the beginning of my first long bout of insomnia...

The next day I had my first experience of the 'morning after'. Little did I know that this was merely a taster of what my life was to become. I lay in bed until 11am before getting up, exhausted and grumpy. All day I could think of nothing but getting some sleep and tried, unsuccessfully, to have a nap in the afternoon. Finally, the evening came and I went to bed early to catch up on all that lost sleep. This time I tried *really* hard to fall asleep... and I spent another night awake...and then another, and another! Now I really began to panic. Previously, I had never missed a night's sleep in my life! What was wrong with me? I reasoned that there was only thing I could do: I would go to bed as early as possible and just *stay* there. If I lay there for long enough, I would have to fall asleep, wouldn't I? I decided to simply lie in bed 'until I slept' – for days if necessary!

Oh my goodness! How wrong I was! The longer I lay there, the more tense I became. I ended up with stiff joints and an aching neck and shoulders through unconsciously holding my body still and tense. For weeks I kept up this terrible pattern – lying in bed for as long as possible and trying as hard as I could to fall asleep. Let me just say at this point: if you currently have any notion that the key to sleeping better is to stay in bed longer then I cannot say forcefully enough just how *wrong* this reasoning is! Sometimes I would manage to get an hour's nap on the sofa in the afternoon, or fall asleep in the library with a book on my head. These naps were the only times when I got really sound sleep and they seemed to be enough to sustain me... just. But night time had become nothing more than one long, angry doze with a pounding heart and a frown on my face.

'Go And See Your Doctor'

I was desperate. I needed help and it was at this point that I made my first big mistake. I did what everyone advises us to do. I did what we are supposed to do. I went to see my doctor.

Knowing what I know today, I still sometimes feel a little bitter about the advice given on that fateful day. Sadly, I know that the same terrible advice given to me all those years ago is still being dished out every day to hundreds of 'fledgling insomniacs'. I now know that at such an early stage, with a few simple modifications to my behaviour I could have broken that silly pattern, stopping this problem in its tracks, and fifteen years of suffering could have been avoided. Do you think simple behaviour modification is what my doctor recommended? No, of course it wasn't. She did what doctors do best – she gave me pills.

I was excited at the thought of my first ever sleeping pill – temazepam, also known as Restoril, one of the benzodiazepine family of drugs. It seemed fun, a

bit risqué, a legal 'drug' with the power to send you to sleep. I also believed that all my problems were over, that I'd wake up tomorrow, feeling great with all this sorry business behind me. That night I took my first ever temazepam and fell asleep quickly, or rather, I fell unconscious quickly. I was surprised to awaken in the morning quite early, not refreshed and energetic, but with a feeling of thick-headed grogginess – my first ever sleeping pill hangover. As the day went on, I expected to perk up a bit but this never happened. The groggy feeling lasted all day and was almost enough to put me off taking another pill. However, the next night the same thing happened. I got up in the morning feeling no better than when I had missed a night's sleep and it was difficult to work out whether I preferred the feeling of sleep deprivation or the hangover from the temazepam. I took temazepam for only a couple more days before it stopped working; it was no longer succeeding in sending me to sleep, and the night long 'angry dozing' was back. I then discovered that there is a feeling *worse* than either sleep deprivation or sleeping pill hangover: the combination of the two! In fifteen years, I have never read a book, an article or heard any mention from any medical professional, or in any medical journal, of the horror of this experience. As you may well know, the feeling of sleep deprivation *combined* with a sleeping pill hangover is horrific, desperate, and worse than anything that insomnia alone can make a person feel.

I went back to my doctor to tell her about my surprising lack of success with temazepam. Unbelievably, nitrazepam was quickly to follow. nitrazepam, also known as Mogadon is almost never prescribed for insomnia in the UK any more as it is highly addictive, but this was 1993 and there were still unscrupulous doctors willing to offer it. Unlike temazepam, nitrazepam knocked me out like a sledgehammer. There was no dozing here, I was unconscious. The next day the hangover was still present but was not as bad, better than with temazepam. I took the nitrazepam for about a fortnight after which the same thing happened as had done with temazepam. I found that I could stay awake all night and was only managing to fall into a light doze. I needed a higher dose, which I took, and which worked.

I had had to increase my dose after a fortnight! I realised immediately that this drug had the potential to be horribly addictive and stopped taking it. *I was one of the lucky ones.* If I had not had the presence of mind and the good fortune to stop taking the nitrazepam of my own accord, I might have had a very different story to tell – and it might not have been a recovery story!

On the third visit to the doctor I refused any more sleeping pills and a different approach was taken. This was the time of the birth of a new wonder drug – a panacea which had the capability of curing depression for ever with no side-effects. So effective was this drug that many intelligent people actually spoke of putting it in the water supply in order to make the world a happier place.

Prozac – ‘The Wonder Drug’

“Insomnia is a sign of depression,” the doctor told me. “Take Prozac and your sleep will improve.” I had never complained of depression. I was feeling worried about the lack of sleep, but I still considered myself to be a reasonably happy person. However, I trusted the doctor and went home with my Prozac. Being an anti-depressant, Prozac would take at least 2 weeks to start working and I took it for several months before I realised the effect it was starting to have. It induced what can only be described as a gradually increasing paranoia and sense of dread, an underlying feeling that ‘something was always very wrong’, which I had never before experienced. It is not an exaggeration to say that my general mental state, and my sleeping actually deteriorated! Prozac is supposed to make you feel happier by balancing serotonin levels which are often depleted in depressed people. But the sad truth is that for many people (perhaps those who never had a lack of serotonin in the first place) it can have a very negative effect.

On my next visit, I saw a different doctor, a man this time. He took a very different approach which did not involve sending me away with a new bottle of pills. He took my problem very seriously and referred me to a psychiatrist. But there would be a long wait... After six months of appalling sleep, I finally got my psychiatrist's appointment.

A Psychiatrist's Advice

This psychiatrist knew as much about sleep problems as I did about particle physics, perhaps less. After a very thorough and intrusive investigation into my past, my childhood, my relationship with my parents, siblings and partners, my every thought, he concluded by saying “I can offer you two things – drug treatment or psychoanalysis. And I don't think either is going to help you.” I was devastated. It was as if I had tried all that the medical profession had to offer and nothing could help. It was at this point that I started to form an inconceivably destructive belief, one that would be with me for many years: I was incurable, my problem was no like other person's. I was different.

And so my insomnia remained and life went on, if you could call it living...

The Online Information Explosion

Then in 1996 something monumental happened which was to dominate and control my sleeping patterns and behaviour for the next ten years. I got access to the internet for the first time and the whole world with all its sleep cures was now at my fingertips.

I started looking into alternative sleep treatments, pouring money into all manner of sleep cures, including hypnosis, meditation, acupuncture and a myriad of herbs, pills and potions. But nothing ever seemed to make any difference. Every remedy I tried was supposed to improve sleep, but not mine, it seemed. It was as if my body was automatically rejecting anything that was supposed to help me sleep. Any herb or pill I would fight, any relaxation technique would wake me up. It was at this point that I first tried Sleep Restriction Therapy. Tragically, this experience was so disastrous that it put me off *all* behaviour modification for over a decade. And so my bad sleeping habits continued unchecked.

As I tested each new thing and rejected it, one belief kept on growing

My problem is different.

Is this starting to sound familiar..?

Finding The Online Insomnia Community

Not only did I discover that there were literally thousands of new cures and remedies to try, I also discovered a worldwide community of insomniacs like myself. How wonderful to find a whole new community of sympathetic, empathetic, well-meaning friends who could understand exactly what I was going through. We would write to each other by email and on forum sites. We would converse and commiserate, tell our tales, suggest remedies and offer sympathy when they didn't work. I was no longer alone! There were insomniacs like me all over the world, millions of them, all suffering just like me, just like *you!*

I even started to hear from people whose problems were worse than mine! Some people were desperately addicted to sleeping pills, some people apparently didn't sleep at all, and most amazingly – some people had suffered for 30 years! While listening to all these tales of woe a strange thing started to happen... rather than be encouraged by the few success stories, or comforted that in comparison my problem was not so bad, I instead found myself completely identifying with these people and their terrible situations. Perhaps this has happened to you, too. Their stories terrified me! All I could think was that my

future had exactly the same in store. Their fears soon became *my* fears, and before long, their problems became mine too.

My life had now altered beyond all recognition. My obsession had grown to unhealthy levels and every moment of my life was now ruled by thoughts about sleep. From the time I got up, what I ate, what I drank, whether and when I exercised, whether and when I drank coffee, or cola, all these simple decisions could not be made without taking into account their possible effect on my sleep.

And then there were daily dilemmas about sleep remedies - should I take a Nytol, should I not, should I meditate before bed, what should I read, what should I watch on television, should I get drunk, should I avoid water in case I woke up needing the loo? Should I, should I, should I? Every decision of my life had to pass the self-imposed 'will it affect my sleep?' filter.

Making plans went completely out of the window. I stopped going on holiday. I avoided staying with friends and never invited people to my home. I still had a social life but activities needed to be spontaneous decisions made on the same day. I wouldn't dare suggest meeting a friend for lunch, a weekend picnic or even a shopping trip. Looking back, I am amazed that my friends continued to bother with me at all.

Insomnia had taken over my entire life and I was now set in a pattern which was to last another ten years. On occasion I would get a really good night, tantalising me with the sheer joy of a life without exhaustion. But these were rare - most nights were spent in a light doze, giving me just enough sleep to survive but not enough to ever really feel OK. And, on those 'special nights' when I had something important or exciting to get up for, I would get no sleep at all.

The New Non-benzodiazepines

Despite my disastrous experience with pills, I still couldn't give up the idea that some sort of pill might just work for me. Especially as I now had a new doctor, one who was very free with her prescription-writing pen. She was very enthusiastic about a whole new range of sleeping pills which were completely different to all others that had gone before. These were the so-called non-benzodiazepines, which apparently came without any of the addictive qualities and terrible side-effects of the previous benzodiazepine-based drugs. My doctor prescribed zopiclone, commonly known as Zimovane or Imovane. Again, I was moderately excited about this new drug and took it with some hope.

The zopiclone gave me about 2 hours of thick-headed unconsciousness from which I woke feeling like I hadn't slept at all. But most shocking, once again, was the morning's hangover. I had plunged into an instant waking pit of despair,

which lasted most of the day. I only took the drug for two nights. I would never take it again, the effect was too horrible. But my doctor and her busy pen were not finished yet. She had the perfect drug, one that worked quickly but, because it wore off in a few hours, the hangover problem would be eliminated. This drug was the romantically named Sonata, (zaleplon). Unfortunately, Sonata was to have almost no effect at all. Sometimes I did manage to fall asleep, but with the added side-effect of waking me very early in the morning, wide awake and unable to get back to sleep. The following day I would still be left groggy and unsatisfied. So much for Sonata the wonder drug.

No More Pills

At this point I made a decision – I would *never* again take a sleeping pill. I can categorically say that in fifteen years, no sleeping pill whatsoever has given me a good night's sleep without a hangover. I will go further in saying that in fifteen years, there has never been a drug whose effects were preferable to a night without sleep! The rule for me seemed to be *no sleep is better than drugged sleep*.

What is most astonishing is that at this point not one health professional, even the psychiatrist, had ever asked me about my sleeping behaviour. I still had no idea that lying in bed in the morning, for example, far from helping, was actually contributing to the problem.

Sometimes I would decide that I would completely ignore the problem, act like it wasn't there with the thought that eventually, it would go away of its own accord. I would resolve to 'stop letting it take over my life, I would be happy no matter what, I would go on holiday, I would enjoy a camping trip with friends and no bloody insomnia was going to stop me!' And away I would go with my friends, with all good intentions, perhaps to a weekend summer festival. Three miserable days later, having missed three full nights of sleep, I would go home early, tearful and exhausted.

The opposite mood was complete desperation. All I wanted was to be normal. Sometimes I would pray, although I had no religious beliefs. I would cry and rage, scream at myself, scream at God, scream at my partner who had dared to arrange a dinner party at the weekend. I was completely obsessed. I hope you are beginning to get an idea of just how crazy this sleeping problem had made me. At the height of my problem, every part of my life, every decision I ever made was in some way related to sleep, or the lack of it. Insomnia didn't just rule my life. Insomnia was my life...

Turning The Corner

It was in 2006 that things changed for me when a friend convinced me to go on a fortnight's activity holiday in the countryside. The weeks leading up to this trip were ridden with anxiety. What if I didn't sleep at all for two weeks? Would I be able to enjoy myself? I packed every sleep remedy and aid I could think of, pillows, drugs, earplugs, herbs and mp3 player loaded with all number of relaxation recordings...

When I arrived I was in for a shock. The schedule was so strict that there was no time for naps or lie-ins. And, horror of horrors, I had to share a room with three other people. This was intolerable! What if one of them snored? What if they got up and disturbed me in the night? I complained to the organisers about my sleeping arrangements and told them of my problem. I tried to make them understand that my requirements were *different* to ordinary people. This was no *ordinary* sleeping problem – I *had* to have a private room! Unimpressed by my hysterical demands, the organisers told me there was no other place to sleep.

I would never have been able to predict what then happened and the totally unexpected effect it would have on my sleep. We all had to get out of bed at 6am, had little free time and were kept awake throughout the day. I didn't sleep for the first couple of nights which was hard. But with so much going on, there was little time to fret about lost sleep. I actually found myself forgetting about my tiredness and started to enjoy myself. In addition to this, because I knew that these 'important' nights were going to continue for some time, I stopped stressing about them. I *had* to get out of bed and get involved in the social events. I couldn't make excuses for not going, I couldn't tell myself 'it'll be over this time tomorrow', like I normally would. I couldn't engage in my normal routines, and no one was going to take any notice of my demands. There was literally nothing I could do. After a few days, I actually started to forget about my sleeping problem. At bedtime I was sleepy and exhausted... and so I began to sleep.

On the way home from this thoroughly enjoyable fortnight, I reflected on my incredible success with sleeping.

Suddenly I saw the problem in a completely new light. In a flash I realised all the things I was doing wrong. The solution was clear to me and I *knew* I could get over the problem. I hadn't yet found the Holy Grail, but I knew I was on the right road. I had turned a corner with my insomnia and I was never to look back.

Beginning To Write

I started writing things down, any new insight or observation. And so my knowledge and understanding of insomnia grew. Rapidly, my sleeping improved, often surprising me in circumstances where I once would never have expected to sleep. When my online insomnia email friends around the world heard of my recovery, they began begging me for advice. And so I began sharing it with people as best I could. My nights were now taken up writing motivational emails to my insomniac friends. I had no medical training whatsoever, and yet the advice I was able to offer was gratefully received, even by those who had attended the most elite sleep clinics. I had unwittingly become a sleep therapist! Time and time again, I was begged to write a book about my recovery, putting all my good advice down in one place. And so I did. I began to formulate a set of rules, guidelines and advice which was eventually to become the Effortless Sleep Method.

I could still hear the frantic voices of online friends, the online insomniacs crying into the night as they enter the desperate phrases into their search engines - 'insomnia cures', 'why can't I sleep', 'please, someone help me!' I felt such pity for these poor lost, misunderstood souls that pretty soon, I knew the programme had to also be in the form of a paperback. This would be the fastest and easiest way to reach them, as it has reached you.

I hope this excerpt has given you a flavour of the book and what the method can do for you. The rest of the book could be with you in just a few minutes.

To find out more about the Effortless Sleep Method, visit us again at www.effortless-sleep.com

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To ask a sleep question or to email us about anything in particular email me on support@effortless-sleep.com

Helping people with insomnia is my life. Let me help you

Sasha