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Don't be too quick to condemn me. I'm sure I'm not alone in my particular fixation but admitting to it is like saying you enjoy biting your nails – it's just not done. You'd think that working in the beauty business and knowing the potentially terrible results of self-extraction (spots and nail marks anyone?) would help quash my compulsion. But no – it has merely given me a huge arsenal with which to wage war on my pores and battle on for the Holy Grail that is perfect skin. I have tried it all: every spot-shrinking, sebum-reducing potion and every 'pore perfecting' facial out there. I've even suffered the most excruciating extractions at the hands of one particular beautician (who shall remain anonymous), which has left me with a small scar on the bridge of my nose.

Dream on

Say goodbye to sleepless nights with nutritionist Charlotte Watts's guide to getting some serious shut-eye

HELP!

WHY IS IT HAPPENING?

SHORT-TERM FIX

LONG-TERM SOLUTION

'I can't get to sleep until the small hours, then I can't get up in the morning.'

This is a pattern, called delayed sleep phase syndrome, and it indicates low levels of the brain chemical, serotonin, which induces sleep. This can be worse in winter, when we see less sunlight.

Eat high-tryptophan foods – fish, chicken, turkey, bananas, yoghurt, eggs, soy beans, almonds, avocados and wholegrain crackers – to up serotonin levels.

Herbs, such as valerian, skullcap, hops and passionflower may promote improved sleep cycles – take as a tea, or a tincture, or get advice from a medical herbalist. Visit nimh.org.uk.

'It takes me two hours to get to sleep. Although my body feels very tired, my mind races.'

Our bodies should be winding down at the end of the day. However, if, at bedtime, you are feeling like you are still ready for anything, it shows that your stress levels may be quite high throughout the day.

Take a hot bath a few hours before bedtime, with a few couple of drops of chamomile or lavender essential oil to unwind. Write down your worries if they are following you into sleep.

We are commonly low in the calming mineral, magnesium. Check your levels with Hair Mineral Analysis at mineralcheck.com, or try two Lamberts Magasorb with dinner (from nutricentre.com).

'I wake with a fright in the middle of the night and can't stop worrying.'

Low blood sugar at night can make the body think it might be slipping into a coma, so it gives you a shot of adrenaline to shoot levels up! This puts you into the 'fight or flight' response – not the best way to relax.

The Bach Flower Remedies Aspen and Rock Rose help with fears, anxieties and sudden alarm. Take as a preventative before bed, or when you wake as a remedy. Visit bachfloweressences.com.

Balance blood-sugar levels by eating little and often, and eat protein with each meal. Have a small snack before bed to keep blood-sugar levels up. Try celery – a traditional insomnia cure. Munch on sticks with houmous, or have it as soup for dinner.

'At night, I cough and find it hard to breathe, and I don't have a cold.'

Constricted airways can be a sign that you are wrongly aligned in bed, and you may need to change your sleeping position. Sleeping on your back can hinder full breathing.

Sleep in the foetal position and ensure that your head and neck are supported. Sprinkle lemon balm or eucalyptus oils on your pillow to clear your airways.

Nasal decongestants and other cold medications, although known to cause drowsiness, can also stimulate, so avoid before bed. Consider a new mattress and pillow that fully support your whole spine.

'Sometimes, I wake up with a headache or sweating in the night.'

Our liver detoxifies what the day has thrown up during the night, usually between 1am and 3am. If we are feeling a tad toxic, this can come out as sweat, or the toxins can cause a headache.

Avoid heavy meals three hours before bedtime to give your liver a rest. Limit alcohol in the evening. Alcohol induces sleep, but may disrupt deeper sleep cycles.

Yoga stimulates the liver and calms the nervous system, which creates good-quality sleep. Try some classes to learn calming poses; the downward dog, supported shoulder stand or any forward bend. Visit bwy.org.uk.

'I have to feed my baby at around 2am. After that, I can't get back to sleep.'

Responses in a mother's body trigger an action to wake you up and feed your child. Although the milk-inducing hormone, prolactin, is a relaxant, the stimulation of getting up can get in the way of sleep.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, sugar, cheese, chocolate, pork, aubergine, potatoes, spinach and tomatoes: they all contain stimulating tyramine.

Techniques, such as guided imagery and progressive relaxation can help train your body to go to sleep. See a hypnotherapist to learn how; visit bsch.org.uk. Or, listen to the *Sleep Soundly* CD, from vitalia-health.co.uk.



Whether you wake up in the week hours or

	WHY IS IT HAPPENING?	SOS HELP	LONG-TERM HELP?