What happened when I tried the U.S. Army's tactic to fall asleep in two minutes

The technique has been used to help people fall asleep in the most uncomfortable circumstances, and best of all, it's said to work for 96% of the people who tried it for six weeks.

BY MICHAEL GROTHAUS

If you often find yourself having trouble falling sleep, you're not alone. The American Sleep Association (ASA) says that 50 million to 70 million U.S. adults have a sleep disorder. Among that group, insomnia is the most common. The ASA says that 30% of adults have reported short-term, insomnia-like symptoms, and 10% of American adults deal with chronic insomnia.

A major study of 440,000 adults showed that 35% of us get fewer than seven hours of sleep a night. That means there are millions of people at risk of facing serious health problems that lack of sleep can cause, including obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. But it's not just health problems these people have to deal with.

Lack of sleep is a big problem for your productivity–and for the company that employs you. A 2015 Harvard study showed the average worker loses the equivalent of 11 days of productivity every year due to sleep issues. And a 2017 study found that poor sleep cost U.S. businesses a staggering $411 billion in lost productivity every year.

The recommended amount of sleep an adult needs is between seven and nine hours each night. But for many, finding this time isn't the problem–it's falling asleep once your head hits the pillow. I'm one of those people who occasionally has this problem, and in the past have tried everything from meditation to medication. But for the last four weeks, I tried something different–and it's something worth trying if you have sleep problems.

Recently, an old method used by the U.S. Army to help soldiers fall to sleep in less than ideal conditions (like battlefields) has resurfaced. The *Independent* says the technique was first described in a book from 1981 called *Relax and Win: Championship Performance* by Lloyd Bud Winter.

In the book, Winter describes the technique designed by the U.S. Army to make sure soldiers didn't make mistakes due to grogginess. The technique apparently sends you off to sleep within two minutes.

HERE'S THE QUICK SLEEP TECHNIQUE

So four weeks ago, I tried it. The technique mainly involves muscle relaxation, breathing, and visualization tricks anyone can do. Here's how it works:

1. Sit on the edge of your bed. Make sure only your bedside light is on, your phone is silenced, and your alarm is set for the morning.

2. Now relax your facial muscles. First tighten them up in a wincing motion, and then slowly let your muscles naturally loosen. And let your tongue fall any which way in your mouth.

3. Once your face feels like deflated putty, let gravity pull your shoulders naturally toward the ground. Let your arms dangle too, one side at a time.

4. While doing this, breathe in and out, listening to the sound of your breath. With each breath, let your chest relax further and then let gravity relax your thighs and lower legs.

5. Once your body feels like nothing more than a loosely formed lump of clay, try to clear your mind for 10 seconds. If thoughts come naturally, let them pass–just keep your body loose and limp. After a few more seconds you mind should feel clearer.

6. Now picture one of the following two scenarios: you lying in a canoe in a calm lake with clear blue skies above you; or you in a velvet hammock, gently swaying in a pitch-black room. If you happen to be a person who isn't great at visualization, you can instead chant the mantra, "Don't think, don't think, don't think" for 10 seconds instead.

And that's it. At the end of these steps, which should take about two minutes, lie down and turn out the bedside light. Ideally, you'll drift off to sleep within a few minutes.

HOW THE TECHNIQUE WORKED FOR ME

When I began the technique I was heartened that the Army found that it worked for 96% of people who tried it–but that was for people who tried it for six weeks. That's why I wasn't too bummed when I tried this technique every night in the first week and nothing happened.

But then something changed starting at around the ninth night. And honestly, I can't be sure if it was due to the technique itself or the sheer boredom caused by trying to calm my body into a lump-like state. I relaxed my muscles and visualized swinging in a velvety hammock. And the next thing I knew, it was around 3 a.m., and I woke up, awkwardly splayed over my bed, with my feet still touching the floor and the bedside light still on. I was deeply tired and only woke enough to swing my legs into bed and turn off the lamp.

But the event gave me hope, and the next night I did it again. This time I didn't pass out right away, but felt a great release come over my body after my hammock visualization, and I crawled into bed and turned out the light. Next thing I remember is waking eight hours later, feeling rested.

So I can confidently say this decades-old technique worked for me. Mind you, it didn't work every night. Some nights during that second week I didn't get that "release" after my visualization. But as the weeks went on, the trick seemed to work more often than not. And it seemed to work more effectively when I visualized myself in a velvety hammock instead of in a canoe, so it helps to switch up visualizations to see what works best.

So should you try it? There's no reason not to, based on my experience. By the fourth week, it was working more often than not. One thing I know for sure is that trying this is better taking an Ambien–and doesn't take much more time than swallowing a pill.

So go ahead and give it a try. Then sleep on it. You might be surprised by the results.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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