

Stimulus Control – or “keeping bed for sleep”

Stimulus control is a way to make sure that being in bed (the “stimulus”) is not linked with unhelpful activities. If this is happening, then going to bed can actually make people feel *more* awake!

Sometimes we get habits of doing things that are likely to make us feel more awake by doing things like:

- Watching TV or videos in the bedroom before bedtime
- Talking on the phone, using social media, studying or problem-solving at bed time or whilst in bed.
- Lying in bed “trying to sleep” – this actually tends to have the opposite effect!
- Lying in bed a long time after waking up in the morning.

All of these things mean that the stimulus of being in bed is linked with things other than sleeping, which means it is less effective at cuing us into sleep. Stimulus control gradually makes bed a stronger cue for sleeping, by making the association with sleep stronger and makes falling asleep easier.

These are the steps of stimulus control:

1. Only use your bedroom for sleeping

Do not use your bed and bedroom to study or interact with friends on the phone or social media, or to watch TV or videos. The hope is to link bed with sleep, not stimulation. Try to do these activities somewhere else. This might mean using headphones, or negotiating a study zone outside your bedroom with the rest of the family.

2. Do not stay in bed half an hour before sleep time and after you wake in the morning

If you like to read in bed do it for no more than half an hour. In the morning, get up within half an hour of waking. Again, this will help to link the bed with sleep, not being awake.

3. Make sure you are feeling sleepy when you turn off the lights to go to sleep

This means learning what it feels like to be *sleepy tired* rather than just physically tired. Signs of sleepiness include droopy eyes, head nodding, and waves of sleepy feelings. Don't use the clock or other people's bed times to decide on yours: listen to your body.

4. Do not lie in bed if you are not sleeping

Remember to only give yourself up to half an hour to fall asleep. Don't worry about exact timings: just when you notice that you have been awake for a while. If this happens, get up, and go somewhere else (preferably another quiet room) and do something relaxing to pass the time, like listening to calm music, doing a crossword or hobby or reading. Do this until you feel sleepy tired again, then you can return to bed.

A good sleeper's bed association



A poor sleeper's bed associations

