
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

What to do when you can't sleep



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Neil.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Neil

You look tired, Rob.

Rob

Well, I didn't sleep well last night. I was **tossing and turning** all night, but I couldn't get to sleep.

Neil

Well, that's a coincidence, as our topic today is **insomnia** - the condition some people suffer from when they find it difficult to get to sleep when they go to bed.

Rob

Thankfully I don't really have insomnia, but every now and again, I find it difficult to get to sleep.

Neil

Well, keep listening and we might have some advice to help with that, but first, a question: What is the record for the longest a human has gone without sleep? Is it:

- A) about seven days?
- B) about nine days? Or
- C) about 11 days?

What do you think, Rob?

Rob

All of those seem impossible! So I've got to go with the shortest - about seven days.

Neil

Well, if you can stay awake long enough, I'll let you know at the end of the programme. Dr Michael Grandner is an expert in all things to do with sleep. He was interviewed recently on the BBC radio programme Business Daily. He was asked what his best tip was to help you get to sleep if you are finding it difficult. What was his suggestion?

Dr Michael Grandner

And it sounds **counter-intuitive**, but trust me I've got **decades** of data behind this statement: If you cannot sleep, get out of bed.

Neil

So Rob, how does he suggest you help yourself to get to sleep?

Rob

Well actually, he says that the best thing to do is to get out of bed!

Neil

That sounds exactly the opposite of what you should do, doesn't it?

Rob

Well, he does say that his advice is **counter-intuitive**, which means exactly that. That it is the opposite of what you might expect.

Neil

And he says that this advice is backed up by **decades** of research. A **decade** is a period of 10 years and when we say **decades**, it's a general term for many years, at least 20. Let's hear that advice again from Dr Grandner.

Dr Michael Grandner

And it sounds **counter-intuitive**, but trust me I've got **decades** of data behind this statement: If you cannot sleep, get out of bed.

Neil

So why is getting out of bed good advice? Here's the explanation from Dr Grandner.

Dr Michael Grandner

When you're in bed and you're not asleep and you do that over, and over, and over again for extended periods of time, the ability of the bed to put you to sleep starts getting **diluted**. Not only that, it starts getting replaced by thinking, and **tossing and turning**, and worrying, and doing all these things. When you're not asleep, get out of bed. This is probably one of the most effective ways to prevent **chronic insomnia**. It's also one of the really effective ways to treat it. It won't work 100% of the time, but it will actually work more than most people think.

Neil

We normally sleep in beds. Beds are designed to make it easy to sleep, but if we can't sleep, that makes the bed's impact weaker. As Dr Grandner says, 'it **dilutes** the power of the bed

to help us sleep'.

Rob

When you **dilute** something, you make it weaker. For example, you can dilute the strength of a strong fruit juice by adding water to it.

Neil

So if we stay in bed, **tossing and turning**, which is the expression we use to describe moving around in the bed trying to get to sleep, we begin to think of the bed as place where we don't sleep rather than as a place where we do sleep. So, get out of bed to break the connection.

Rob

This he says is a positive way to approach **chronic insomnia**. **Chronic** is an adjective that is used to describe conditions that are long-lasting. So we're not talking here about occasionally not being able to get to sleep, but a condition where it happens every night.

Neil

Let's hear Dr Grandner again.

Dr Michael Grandner

When you're in bed and you're not asleep and you do that over, and over, and over again for extended periods of time, the ability of the bed to put you to sleep starts getting **diluted**. Not only that, it starts getting replaced by thinking, and **tossing and turning**, and worrying, and doing all these things. When you're not asleep, get out of bed. This is probably one of the most effective ways to prevent **chronic insomnia**. It's also one of the really effective ways to treat it. It won't work 100% of the time, but it will actually work more than most people think.

Neil

Time to review today's vocabulary, but first, let's have the answer to the quiz question. What is the record for the longest a human has gone without sleep? Is it:

- A) about seven days?
- B) about nine days?
- C) about 11 days?

What did you think, Rob?

Rob

I thought it must be about seven days.

Neil

Well, I'm afraid you're not right. The answer, rather amazingly, is actually just over 11 days. Extra bonus points for anyone who knew that that was done in 1964 by someone called Randy Gardner.

Rob

That's extraordinary. It's difficult to imagine even going a couple of days without sleep, but I!! I wonder how long he slept for after that!

Neil

14 hours and 40 minutes.

Rob

You've got all the answers, haven't you?

Neil

Well when I can't sleep, I get up and read trivia! And now it's time for the vocabulary. Today our topic has been **insomnia**.

Rob

This is the word for the condition of not being able to sleep. And something that people do when they are trying to sleep is **toss and turn** in bed.

Neil

The opposite of what seems logical or obvious is **counter-intuitive**. It goes against what you might expect. So if you can't sleep, get out of bed.

Rob

Our next word is **diluted**. This is from the verb **to dilute** which means 'to make something less strong'.

Neil

And finally there was the adjective **chronic**. This is an expression for a medical condition that is long-lasting. So someone who has **chronic insomnia** regularly has difficulty getting enough sleep. It's not just something that happens now and again.

Rob

Well, we hope that 6 Minute English isn't a cure for insomnia, but I do find listening to podcasts and spoken radio helps me get to sleep.

Neil

Well, before we all drop off to sleep from the comforting tone of your voice, Rob, it's time for us to say goodbye. That's it for this programme. For more, find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our Youtube pages, and of course our website: bbclearningenglish.com, where you can find all kinds of other programmes and videos and activities to help you improve your English. Thank you for joining us, and goodbye.

Rob

Bye!

VOCABULARY

insomnia

the condition of not being able to sleep

tossing and turning

moving around a lot in bed and trying to get to sleep without success

counter-intuitive

the opposite of what seems obvious or natural, but which may be correct

decades

(here) many years

diluted

made weaker

chronic

long-lasting (of a medical condition)