



SLEEP... AND HAVE IDEAS!

A who's who of creativity cite sleep as an influence, inspiration or tool! Robert Louis Stevenson devised the plot for 'Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' after a dream. Paul McCartney dreamt the tune for 'Yesterday' and went on to write 'Yellow Submarine' after a moment of inspiration while falling asleep...

Anyone else? Yes! Dreams inspired Mary Shelley to write Frankenstein, Jack Nicklaus to correct his golf swing, the chemist Friedrich August Kekulé to consider the structure of the benzene molecule as a ring, and Nobel-Prize winning physiologist Otto Loewi to prove his theory on the chemical transmission of nerve impulses.

Why are we telling you all of this if it's purely anecdotal? Well, because science has a bit of catching up to do! Thousands of creative people believe sleep and trance states help them produce ideas but research into the subject is, in comparative terms, in its infancy. Interestingly, though, the anecdotal evidence covers inspiration in everything from music and literature to sport and science.

If you ever noticed you felt better about a problem after you 'slept on it', you already know part of the reason why sleep helps. Some stages of sleep seem to take away part of the emotional resonance of real-life events. That means you really do look at things differently after you've slept on them just because you do sleep on them! So even without any techniques at all, sleep helps you see things differently - and seeing things differently is the key to all creativity!

Easy come, easy go: Most of the suggestions here depend on your being able to record what you were thinking at a time when the very nature of the beast makes it incredibly difficult to do so. So make sure you keep your notebook and pen, or a voice-recording device, to hand when you go to try these techniques.

Going, going gone! The hypnagogic state is what you experience as you fall asleep; it's the drowsy time between being awake but before actually sleeping... Some say that the things that run through the mind as they begin to nod off are incredibly valuable. One way to see if it's useful to you involves you sitting or lying down ready to doze while holding a spoon or ball bearing in one hand... And a metal tray or pan on the floor below...

Now, give a little thought to the issues you face or the problem you want solved. Then relax and let your mind wander. As you begin to feel drowsy, just let the feeling wash over you. At the moment you doze off, your hand will relax completely, the object will fall and the noise will jolt you awake! Grab your pad or recorder and write down whatever's in your mind - even if it seems completely irrelevant or nonsensical.

'I entrust DMI with everything - from generating brilliant ideas to making those ideas reality.'
Natasha Sweet, NSPCC

Does that really work?! It can do! DMI's DeeJ has tried it a few times and found it a bit 'knacky'. The dominant thought he has on awakening is, "What the bloody hell's going on?!" This tends to reduce the usefulness of the exercise... However, Thomas Edison routinely used this device and, to be fair, DeeJ did produce a couple of obscure thoughts using this process... But has more luck with the opposite idea...

You're back in the room: Just as going to sleep can help, the moment between sleeping and wakefulness also has its role! This - the hypnopompic state - is similar to, but physiologically different from, hypnagogia. One way to get the most out of it is to go to sleep giving thought to what you're working on and then, on waking, write down everything you can remember about your dreams. It might sound ludicrous, but if you can develop the habit of writing - scrawling, really - what seems like irrelevant gibberish while still half asleep, you might be pleased to discover some thinking that is very different to that which you produce consciously.

Does THAT work? Again, experimenting with this shows that, yes, it can be useful. One of the magic tricks that DeeJ includes in his book, 'Magic by Phone', is the product of a dreamy thought as rousing from sleep. You can take the technique to its logical conclusion by writing things down every time you wake - not just the 'main one' in the morning.

The Dream Diary: Many scientists believe that dreams are metaphorical representations of events that have emotional resonance for the dreamer. While the jury's still out on that, it seems to help some people's creativity to write down their dreams. The habit of keeping a diary by the side of your bed for this purpose - and using it routinely - is a tricky one to develop, but it increases your chances of a sleep-inspired idea coming to the fore. As Linus Pauling says, "The best way to have one good idea is to have lots of ideas." Part of the secret to getting it to work is to write things down in a near stupor... Under no circumstances should you try to analyse what you write there and then.

Making sense of it all: Going back to your diary or notebook and looking at the scrawlings can produce ideas in three ways. First, you may just have a serendipitous moment in which you discover something that you've written in a notebook or dream diary suddenly strikes you as useful... And a much ballyhooed 'Eureka' moment occurs! Second, you might find that the metaphorical nature of the imagery may, in itself, present a new perspective for you to consider.

Third - and most likely - you might find that your writing, once deciphered, remains truly abstract and seems to be completely random... And that nothing comes to mind either from reading it back or dwelling on it as a metaphor! That's fine. You can still use those dreams by making a deliberate effort to connect what seems to be nonsense to problems you want to solve. The effort of trying to make these connections often provides original insight.

All sound like too much work? Keep in mind that you can try making connections between as little as just a few words. Deej awoke the other morning having dreamed about a jigsaw puzzle of a crossword. Pondering on that led to his combining an old mathematical puzzle with a crossword before applying it to a client's brand... This resulted in the execution of what appears to be a completely new idea that almost certainly would not have come to light through other creative techniques.

You are feeling sleepy... DMI's Charly once needed to generate a number of ideas in short order - but found herself getting worked up and increasingly stuck for thought. More out of curiosity than anything, she tried hypnosis. To this day she remains stunned at the results! She says that she relaxed very deeply, then simply listened to a therapist talk for a bit... As expected, nothing unusual happened in the session itself - but, driving home, Charly was suddenly struck by a torrent of thoughts and ideas - to such an extent that she had to pull over to write them all down!

This makes sense to those in the know! First, the fact that Charly was able to relax deeply helped in itself. If you're stressed, your mind and body have to dedicate resources to dealing with that, leaving less capacity for ideation and problem solving. Next - despite the way hypnosis is depicted in the media - it's a little like being half asleep. You remain conscious and more open to suggestion - but no, you won't be persuaded to rob a bank and wake up with no memory of it! Instead, you might find that a therapist or audio download give suggestions, directly or otherwise, that let your mind access creative resources you already have. This subject would easily fill an Info Sheet in itself but suffice to say you can safely and easily give hypnosis a go when you download a creative audio session here: <http://www.hypnosisdownloads.com/personal-productivity/creativity>