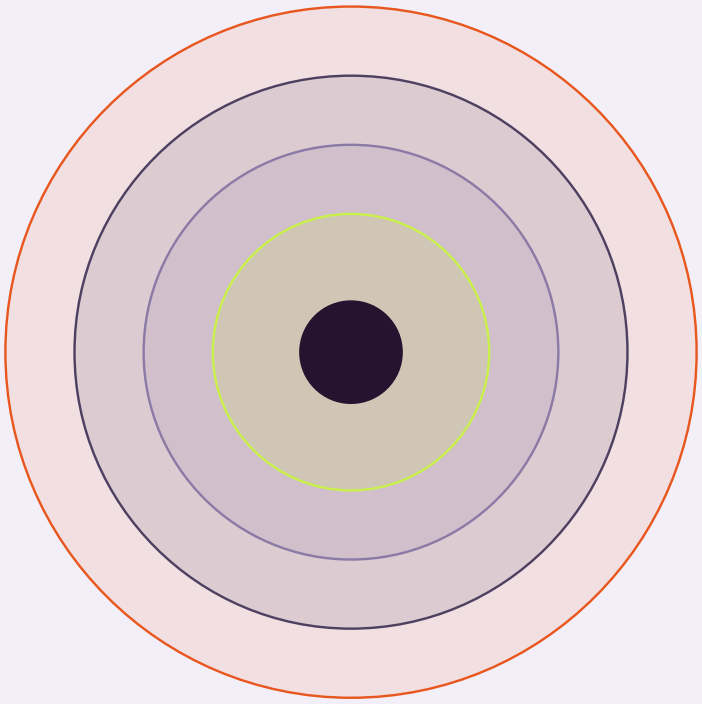


Say Good Night to Insomnia: The Six-Week, Drug-Free Program De-veloped at Har-

vard Medical School

A reading of the book by Gregg D. Jacobs (1998)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Say Good Night to Insomnia: The Six-Week, Drug-Free Program Developed at Harvard Medical School, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Gregg D. Jacobs is an insomnia specialist and sleep researcher who developed this programme at Harvard Medical School, and Herbert Benson, known for the relaxation response, wrote the foreword. The book argues that most long-lasting insomnia is learned: a few bad nights leave behind habits and worried thoughts that keep poor sleep going long after the first cause has passed, so it can be unlearned without sleeping pills. Its six-week programme is a form of cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia, now usually called CBT-I. It asks readers to keep a sleep diary, cut time in bed back towards the time they actually sleep, keep the bed for sleep, swap negative thoughts about sleep for more accurate ones, practise the relaxation response, and adjust light, exercise, caffeine and alcohol. It also explains how people taking sleeping pills can come off them slowly, with their doctor's help. A revised edition followed in 2009.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Insomnia that lasts is usually learned, which means it can be unlearned.

A stressful stretch brings a few bad nights. The ways we cope, such as lying in, napping, going to bed early to catch up and worrying in bed, then keep poor sleep going after the stress has passed. Jacobs aims his programme at those habits and thoughts rather than at the original trigger.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Spending less time in bed is often the quickest way to sleep more of it.

Hours spent lying awake teach the body that bed is a place to be awake. Bringing time in bed closer to the time you actually sleep makes sleep deeper and less broken, and the window then widens as sleep fills it. This is sleep scheduling, the step most people resist and the one the programme leans on hardest.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Get up at the same time every day, whatever kind of night it was.

A fixed rise time sets the body clock. Sleeping in after a bad night feels like repair, but it pushes the next night's sleepiness later and starts the cycle again. Weekends count too.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Give the bed one job, and get up when it isn't doing it.

If you are wide awake and getting frustrated, the programme says to leave the bed, do something quiet in dim light, and come back only when sleepy. Repeated over a few weeks, this rebuilds the link between bed and sleep. Behavioural sleep medicine calls it stimulus control.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Your thoughts about lost sleep can do more harm than the lost sleep itself.

Predictions like a ruined tomorrow or never sleeping again raise arousal at the very moment you need to wind down. Jacobs asks readers to catch these thoughts and answer them with more accurate ones, for example that most people get through a short night better than they expect.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You cannot force sleep. You can only set it up and step out of its way.

Trying hard to sleep is a form of effort, and effort keeps the brain alert. The programme moves the work to the daytime: a steady schedule, a calmer evening, a quieter mind. At night the job is to let go of the outcome.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A daily relaxation practice lowers the arousal that keeps you awake.

The book teaches the relaxation response, the method Herbert Benson described: sit quietly, breathe slowly, repeat a word or attend to the breath, and let passing thoughts go. Practised daily, it becomes a skill you can also use when you wake in the night.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Light, movement and temperature tell the body clock when night has come.

Daylight in the morning, exercise during the day and a cool, dark bedroom all support the body's own rhythm, while late caffeine and evening alcohol work against it. On their own these sleep hygiene steps rarely fix chronic insomnia. They help as part of the whole programme.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Sleeping pills can help for a while, but coming off them is a medical decision.

Jacobs presents the behavioural programme as a lasting alternative to pills, and a 2004 trial he led found it did better than the sleeping pill zolpidem. For readers already taking medication, the book describes cutting down slowly. Any change to a medicine should be planned with the doctor who prescribed it.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Keep a sleep diary for one week
- [ ] Choose a fixed rise time
- [ ] Work out your sleep window
- [ ] Turn the clock away
- [ ] Write your 3 a.m. card

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Get up when you are wide awake
- ◯ Practise the relaxation response daily
- ◯ Get morning light and move in the day

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Keep a sleep diary for one week

Each morning, note when you went to bed, roughly how long it took to fall asleep, how long you were awake in the night, and when you got up.

Estimate rather than watching the clock.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Choose a fixed rise time

Pick a get-up time you can keep seven days a week, including weekends.

Set one alarm for it and put the alarm across the room.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Work out your sleep window

Divide your average time asleep by your average time in bed to get your sleep efficiency.

If it is low, set your time in bed close to your average sleep, but never under five hours, and check with your doctor first if you have a medical condition or a job that needs you alert.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Turn the clock away

Face the bedroom clock to the wall and charge your phone out of reach.

Checking the time at night feeds the worry about how much sleep is left.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Write your 3 a.m. card

On a small card, write the two worries that come back most at night and a calmer, more accurate reply to each.

Keep it by the bed and read it instead of arguing in your head.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Get up when you are wide awake

If you feel alert or frustrated in bed, go to another room and do something quiet in dim light, such as reading a dull book.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Practise the relaxation response daily

Once a day, for 10 to 20 minutes, sit quietly, breathe slowly and repeat a calm word on each out-breath.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Get morning light and move in the day

Spend some time outside soon after you get up, and exercise on most days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

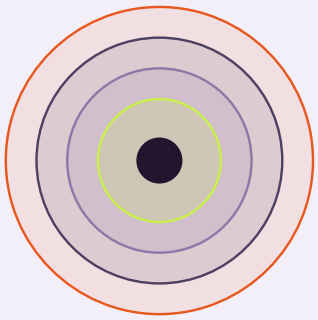
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Stop chasing sleep. Keep the hours, quiet the thoughts, and let the body do what it already knows how to do.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER GREGG D. JACOBS