

Monitoring

When we are concerned about something, we are likely to be “on the lookout” and alert to anything related to that concern. People with sleep difficulties are often on the lookout – monitoring the clock and their bodies to detect how much sleep they are getting and how rested (or exhausted) they feel. However, being on the lookout can make matters worse for people with sleep difficulties.

For example:

While Brandon was trying to fall asleep, he was always alert to how close his body was to falling asleep. He was on the lookout for the physical signs of drifting off such as slowing heart rate and loss of muscle tone. When he detected these sensations he’d think, “Oh great, I’m finally falling asleep,” which would pull him out of the delicious drifting off feeling and jerk him back in to wakefulness.

Cristina always turned out the light at 11:00pm. Then she would monitor her clock to see how long it was taking her to fall asleep. Every time she looked at the clock she’d think, “I hope I get to sleep soon.” As the time ticked on she’d start to think “This is really bad, I should be asleep by now” and “If I don’t get to sleep soon, I’m going to be a mess tomorrow.” These thoughts would increase Cristina’s anxiety and make it even more difficult for her to fall asleep.

Immediately upon waking up, Michelle would monitor her body to see whether it was well rested. She nearly always noticed that her muscles felt tired and her eyes felt heavy. She’d think, “Oh no, I didn’t get enough sleep last night.” This would make her feel anxious and frustrated as she wondered how she would cope with the day ahead.

These examples illustrate how being on the lookout for signs of sleep difficulties can make matters worse. To improve your sleep, it may be helpful to break the habit of monitoring the clock and monitoring your body so closely.

