

The 3am Replay Fix

Five ways out of the loop when your mind will not stop.

It is 3am. You are awake again, replaying something you said, or something you did, or something you should have handled better. None of it is happening now. All of it feels like it is.

You do not have to solve your life at 3am. You need to get out of the loop and get back to sleep. Here are five things to do. Try them in this order, and stop at the first one that works.

Two rules first, and they matter more than the five.

No phone. The screen is a bright light and a fresh job for your mind, and it hands the loop something new to chew on.

No decisions. Nothing you decide at 3am counts. You are not thinking straight, and everything that matters can wait until morning.

1 Say what you are replaying, in one sentence

Out loud, quietly, if it helps. I am replaying the meeting. I am replaying the phone call. One sentence, no detail, no reasons, no arguing with it. Then stop.

Putting it into one plain sentence moves you out of the scene and onto the fact of it. It is the quickest way I know to take the edge off a loop, and it costs nothing.

2 Get out of the bed for ten minutes

Stand up, leave the room, and sit somewhere else with the light low. Take a glass of water with you. Ten minutes, then go back.

A replay runs strongest in the place it started. Changing rooms takes the cue away, and ten quiet minutes gives the loop nothing to feed on.

3 Write the sentence, then answer it as a friend

Keep paper and a pen within reach of the bed. Write down the sentence your mind keeps repeating. Underneath it, write what you would say to a friend who told you the same story over breakfast.

You will not believe the second line straight away. Write it anyway. It is usually the one telling the truth.

4 Give it a time tomorrow

If there is something real to do about it, agree a time with yourself. I will look at this at 9am. Write the time on the same piece of paper.

Your mind will not let go of something that has nowhere to go. A good share of what keeps you awake is the fear of forgetting it.

5 Breathe out longer than you breathe in, then stop chasing sleep

Breathe in through your nose to a count of four, and out to a count of six. Ten slow rounds, quiet and easy. Then lie still and let being awake be fine.

The long exhale settles the body. Trying to force sleep is what keeps the mind switched on, and boredom is what turns it off. If you are still awake twenty minutes later, get up again rather than lying there fighting it. Sleep tends to arrive once you stop demanding it.

That is the whole fix. Five things, in that order, and you stop at the first one that works.

Some nights none of them will feel like they are working and you will still be awake at four. That is not a failure and it does not undo the week. The nights you use it are the nights the loop gets shorter, and that is how it goes.

One more thing. If you are awake like this most nights, week after week, take it to a doctor. Being unable to sleep is a real problem, and you should get checked out if it keeps happening.