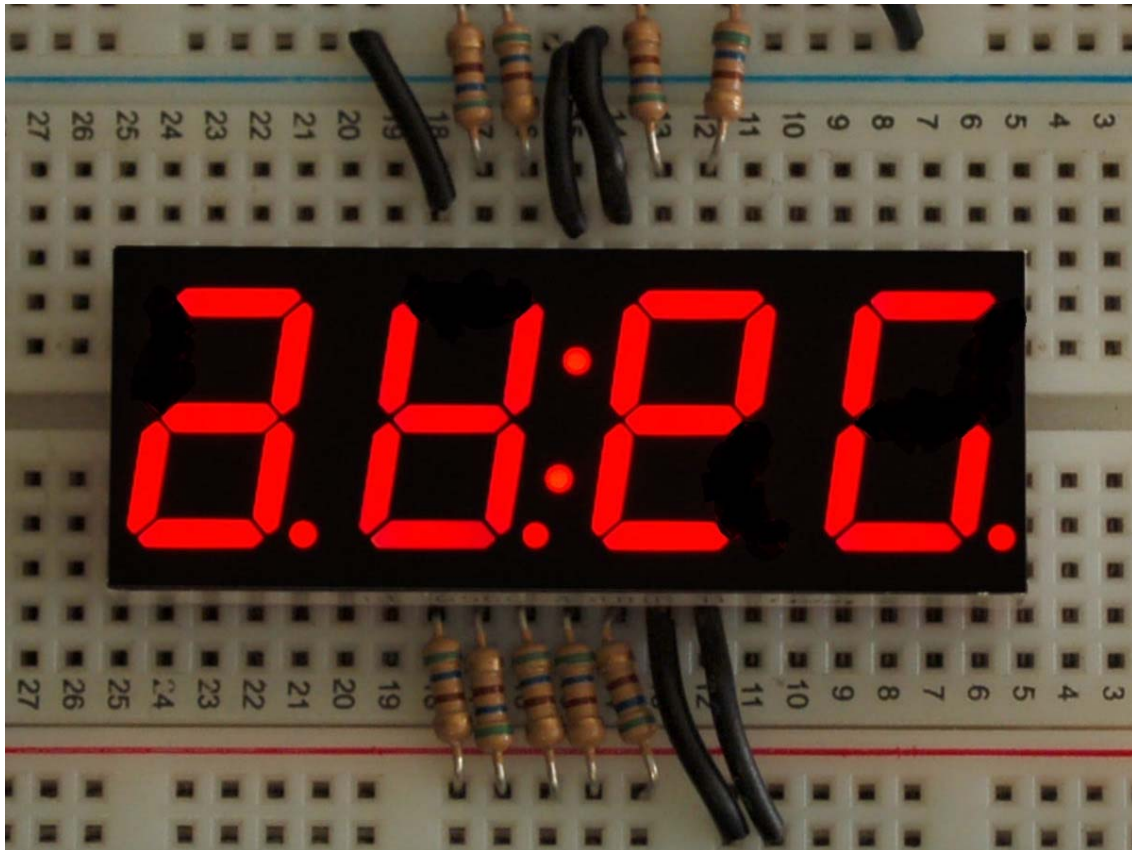


Overcoming Stress by Lucid Dreaming

Shôn Ellerton, Nov 24, 2017

How the art of lucid dreaming can help alleviate stress levels



All of us have come across stress in one form or another; however, the level of stress and how one overcomes that stress varies widely from individual to individual. Stress can be attributed to any number of factors, the most common being family relationships, financial hardship, job security or the death of a loved one. However, when stress is combined with anxiety, this could lead to what I refer to as ‘washing-machine’ brain; when worries and artifacts you can’t eliminate from your head are regurgitated over and over. This usually results in sleepless nights and waking up frequently immersed in a pool of sweat along with a racing pulse and rapid breathing. Overall, an uncomfortable experience.

A comprehensive array of sleeping pills and other medication can help alleviate sleeping disorders; however, in most cases, the effectiveness of the medication is reduced due to the body’s reliance accepting it in ever growing quantities.

Moreover, some medication can be highly addictive and can cause more misery when the medication is stopped.

I am not ashamed to say that I have suffered from severe stress at one time or another. In fact, most people I know have also, at some point in time, suffered from severe stress.

So how do I try to overcome stress? I try to lucid dream.

What is lucid dreaming?

For me, lucid dreaming came naturally at a young age. I did not know what the term *lucid dreaming* was until much later in life. There are many articles and webpages that describe what lucid dreaming is, but I will tell you in my own words what lucid dreaming is like.

Imagine this. Once I have managed to control my breathing, think positively and try to remove self-perpetuating thoughts out of my head, I could ‘*wake up*’ but not *really* wake up at a very early hour in the morning, usually around 3am for me. I am aware of my surroundings but I am not moving. I am aware that my wife is sleeping next to me. I am aware that there is a digital alarm clock on the bedside table. I am aware that there is a small stain on the wooden floor to the right side of the bed. I fixate on the stain on the floor and I am clearly sinking into it. Slowly absorbing myself into the floor. At this time, it is crucial that I avoid outside thoughts as this will flick you back into normal sleep or be truly awakened. The more absorbed I become, the more ethereal I feel. Once I feel that I am fully absorbed, I can walk or even float in the bedroom in which I am sleeping in, or I could be succumbed into another landscape. In most cases, I *know* that I am lucid dreaming; however, there are a few ways to find out if I am definitely in a lucid-dreaming state. I look at a digital clock and try to read the time. If the display on the digital clock looks gibberish (as in the article photo with the red LED display), then this is a surefire way to tell you that you are in a lucid dream.

Some of us may be reminded of a science-fiction film called *Inception* where dreams of others are penetrated by outsiders to seed an idea into another person’s memories. In lucid dreaming, you can control your surroundings to a certain level of degree but this is more difficult than you think because the logical side of your mind simply may not accept it. It is easy; however, to move around including transitioning through solid objects. Being able to fly is certainly not logical but it seems easy enough; however, in my case, I can get to a reasonably high altitude but for some reason or another, I slowly begin to

descend to the ground much like a hot air balloon lands on the ground. It is usually at this point that I am disappointingly awakened from my lucid dream. However, experiencing a lucid dream seems to remove a lot of the stress which has built up in my head.

There is a darker side unfortunately. Like the movie, *Inception*, you can actually venture into further levels of lucid dreams although, thankfully, this does not happen very often as they do not give any sense of calm. Essentially, you are tired within your lucid dream and go to sleep *again* and then enter another lucid dream. Sounds a bit freakish and it is. On one occasion while I was stationed for a few months near to an office in Sydney, I went three levels into a lucid dream. My wife was with me during the time and she came down with some sort of flu-like symptom so I slept on the floor in the living room of the apartment while she slept on the bed. I remember the first lucid dream level as I wandered around the living room and floated outside the window only to then go to the bed where my wife was and then decide to sleep. Only then to enter a second lucid dream whence I got out of the bed and walked back to the living room in which I saw myself sleeping on the floor and then I sat on the sofa and fell asleep awakening in a third dream which comprised a room that I have not seen before and then noticing my wife who clearly did not know who I was or thought I was someone else. Multilevel lucid dreams are often disturbing and waking up from them is often highly disorienting; however, thankfully, they are rare.

How do I start lucid dreaming?

I can only relate from my personal experiences, but lucid dreaming requires the ability to have some sort of way of trying to remember your dreams after you wake up. There is a very short timespan between the moment you begin to wake up and when you are fully woken up in which you have a strong recollection of what you were dreaming about. Some years ago, I kept a dream journal on the bedside table in which I can pen down (usually a highly messy scrawl) as much as I could remember during this timespan. Reading the journal later in your awakened state reinforces the events that have happened in your dream with the greater likelihood of revisiting or continuing the dream where you left off. When revisiting these dreams, there is a growing realisation that you are self-aware that you are, in fact, dreaming, which leads to being in a lucid-dream state. Essentially, the more you do this, the easier it becomes to be lucid.

Lucid dreaming, at least for me, requires that I go to bed at a reasonable time without too much visual stimulation or too much alcohol prior to sleeping. One

or two glasses of wine is fine but beyond that, being able to induce one's self into a lucid-dreaming state becomes more difficult. Ideally, the room that you sleep in must be well-ventilated, comfortable and quiet. Interestingly, there is a hotel I often frequented on business in Melbourne called the Art Series Blackman whose rooms seem to be highly conducive to lucid dreaming. Moreover, the hotel provides leaflets for patrons staying in its rooms describing the art of lucid dreaming. Perhaps it is something to do with the creepy artwork by Charles Blackman portraying Alice in Wonderland adorning all the rooms and corridors like the one pictured below!



Alternative worlds and alternative ideas

After much practice with lucid dreaming, one can build up an alternative world with its own sights and locations which may be revisited simply by conjuring them up during sleep. Quite often, some of these sights and locations can be connected ‘geographically’ to each other with some being similar to actual places in the real world (although often with subtle differences). Once one becomes familiar with this ‘dreamworld’, one will have the awareness to avoid those places which could induce melancholic or cathartic feelings and instead, choose and revisit those positive locations where stress can be offloaded. For those interested in a fictional account of an alternative world through dreams, look no further than H.P Lovecraft’s fantasy novella, *Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*.



Lucid dreams can also spawn brilliant alternative ideas; for example, Mendeleev struggled to find a way to classify natural elements but during a dream, the idea of creating a period table of elements was spawned. Elias Howe dreamt up the idea of inserting a hole in the needle of the sewing machine to complete the stitch, allegedly during a bad dream in which he was being stabbed! Simply put, a lucid dream often removes logical boundaries present in the real world allowing the individual to think out of the box.

Summing it up

Everyone deals with stress in their own way but ultimately, the goal for those with stress is to purge out of the mind those elements in the mind that is causing it. During the daytime or periods of wakefulness, this may be achieved by combining positive distractions, physical exercise and/or engagement in a

familiar hobby or interest. Alternatively, one can confront the source of the stress by 'jumping back in the saddle' of the event or activity that created the stress in the first place. Stress combined with anxiety is usually most problematic when it comes to getting a good night's rest. If one can relieve some of their stresses and anxiety through meditation or some other calming form of activity prior to sleeping, one might be lucky enough to slumber deeply enough to be induced into a lucid dream.