

 **Conscious Life** presents
**SLEEP
SUPER CONFERENCE**

The SleepEasy Method

Guest: Dr Richard Shane

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[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, cohost of the Sleep Super Conference.

Today I'm speaking with Dr Richard Shane, a behavioral sleep therapist for over 25 years, who developed a neurosomatic therapy for sleep, publicly known as SleepEasy. This is an advanced form of cognitive behavioral therapy based on polyvagal theory and the somatic treatment of trauma.

This method incorporates specific somatic processes that act like neurological switches to calm the mind, emotions and body to sleep. Dr Shane is on a mission to treat millions of people worldwide who suffer from insomnia and sleep related difficulties. Dr Shane, thank you so much for being with us today.

Dr Richard Shane

Meagen, thank you for having me.

Meagen Gibson

So I'd love to hear how you developed SleepEasy.

Dr Richard Shane

I do want to answer that, but before the interview, I just want to say I went to your website and I just want to quote something on your website. Meagen is passionate about taking complex concepts and distilling them down to simple, accessible applications we can use, we can take action on in our everyday life. And so that's exactly what we're going to do today.

Meagen Gibson

Awesome. I love hearing that. Thank you. So in the simplest terms, I always say, tell me as you would tell me in the grocery store checkout line about SleepEasy.

Dr Richard Shane

Well, I've been a psychotherapist for decades, and I created integral therapy, which is a form of mind body therapy. And then years ago, I had two traumatic life crises in the same week. And from that, I

plunged into severe insomnia. And for the first year, I was sleeping 3 hours a night. Completely devastated my life.

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Other sleep methods weren't effective. I didn't want to become dependent upon sleep medication. And then I had a realization. What if this wasn't just random hardship? What if this was my life path and I could move through my own insomnia to discover how sleep actually happens and create a method to help people sleep?

So, Meagen, I spent years inwardly exploring what was happening in my body and mind during the hours it would take to fall asleep or back to sleep. And here's the key. Most people wanting to sleep, what they do is they try to quiet their mind first. But early in my exploration, I discovered that mind's activity was rooted in mind pulling away from body tension. So it was the body tension that's primary, but trying to relax body tension using traditional techniques, that's too much work for sleep.

So I cultivated this internal state of consciousness to notice my body sensations on an almost microscopic level, inwardly noticing without trying to make anything happen, and then noticing how body tension would eventually begin to relax by itself, even if it took hours. And the key words there are relaxed by itself. So when that happened, that gave my mind a safe resting place in the body. Mind became quiet by itself.

Again, the key words are by itself, meaning without effort. So, Meagen, countless nights deep in the middle of the night discovering the almost microscopic subtleties of how this happened. What made this possible is I got a pen with a light on the tip of it, the type that nurses use for writing charts in the dark. So I put that pen and a pad of paper on my mattress and I wrote my observations from the middle of the night.

And then the next morning, I read my notes, except for the ones that were illegible scribbles, and I wrote my discoveries. But then years later, I got a small digital voice recorder and I put that on the mattress in the middle of the night, whispering my observations and discoveries into the voice recorder. And the next morning I listened to the recordings and transcribed them.

And doing that, I got goosebumps from the realization that these were subtle, secret discoveries about sleep that people don't usually remember when they woke up. And from this I gained an understanding of the physiological process, how the mind and body actually fall asleep. It was like sleep taught me the secrets of how it happens. And with that knowledge, combined with additional years of research and clinical experience, I created The SleepEasy Method.

Meagen Gibson

Wow, what a story. I love all aspects of that, the impetus that started your self reflection about it and the fact that you've been through this yourself. I always respect and admire someone who not only has the academic and clinical experience, but also has been a sufferer themselves and had to resolve their issues by noticing.

And I also love what you said about just the fact that it's more of almost a mindfulness practice. I'm sure you're going to say more about it, but there's no effort to be made if you're going to notice something, it's not something you need to fix so that you can cognitively fix it. Or people, they'll say, relax your shoulders, or there's all this tension here and you're like, well, obviously if I knew how to relax my shoulders, I would have done that myself already. Thank you very much for noticing.

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So I know that there's more to it than what you've just described. Obviously there's neurological aspects and we mentioned polyvagal theory in your intro. And so I would love it if you could explain a little bit more about how this effortless, if you will, tension release and cognitive release is happening through The SleepEasy Method.

Dr Richard Shane

Primary discovery about sleep, it's an important contribution to the field of sleep medicine, is that there are several body sensations that when you feel them, in a very simple way, it creates the body feeling of falling asleep or falling back to sleep. And so talking about the neurological switches. When people are stressed or anxious or mind is overly active, what most people do is they try to deal with that in their mind and emotions.

But think of this, mind and emotions don't have physical form, so trying to calm them is like trying to chase a cloud. And that makes the process of change more difficult. So when you're stressed or anxious or your mind is too active and you can't sleep, there's almost always a corresponding tension in your body. Body sensations are physical, so they're definite, and that makes the process of change easier.

Now, people may have tension in various areas of their body, but we're selecting just a few specific body sensations. They're like switches in the nervous system that when you calm them, calms your mind and emotions. So now, Meagen, I'm going to describe some of the body sensations of SleepEasy that are like neurological switches, calm your mind, emotions and body into sleep.

And this brief description now, this isn't enough to be able to actually use it for sleep, but I want to give you a preview. So there's a simple way to allow your tongue and throat to relax. Then there's the way you breathe when you're asleep. This is very different from the usual deep, slower abdominal breathing that other people suggest. And here's the key. If you've ever been awake next to someone who's sleeping, you know there's a way people breathe when they're asleep.

And it's different from daytime breathing. SleepEasy gives you an easy way to breathe this, I call it your inner sleep breath. And then the feeling of your inner sleep breath and the quiet inner sound that comes from that, it's like a switch in your nervous system, calms your mind, emotions and body towards sleep. Then your inner sleep breath is in your lungs. Your lungs are around your heart. So that calms your heart, which is a neurological switch, calm your mind and emotions and body towards sleep.

And all of these elements blend together to create a feeling of comfort deep inside the body. Now, most other methods have you relax your feet, legs, hands and arms, but those are the outer parts of your body. With SleepEasy, you're able to calm your tongue, throat, breath, chest, heart and abdomen. So that's kind of calming right down the inside of your body. So you're calming from the inside out rather than the old way of calming from the outside in.

So that's so important. I want to say it again. You're able to calm your tongue, throat, breath, chest, heart and abdomen, which is calming right down the center inside your body. So you're calming from the inside out rather than the outside in. It's much easier and it's much more effective than relaxing your entire body.

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And here's how it gets mind to become quiet. When that happens, it's like mind goes, OOH, that feels really good. And then your mind rests in that comfort deep inside your body, kind of like resting on a soft pillow inside you. Your mind then becomes quiet by itself without trying to make it quiet and without needing meditation.

Now, that's a very different approach to having the mind become quiet. But it makes sense, and it's easy. And during my 30 years of working with clients with insomnia, the other major discovery is the body sensations of sleep. They're the same for just about everyone, kind of like the feeling of swallowing is. So when you experience it, it's a feeling of familiarity.

You think, oh, I know that feeling. I just didn't know how to get to it. And because I developed this SleepEasy Method from exploring the actual process of sleep, this guides you through your body's neurological pathway to sleep. People say this feels like the actual way sleep happens, not like an artificial technique.

Meagen Gibson

Fascinating. There's several things that you said that I want to come back to. When you were describing the way that we breathe when we sleep, I think anybody who is a parent or who has ever tried to put a child to sleep knows exactly what you're saying. If you're holding a child and they start to drift off, you know that you've got to wait to hear the change in their breathing before you can sneak out of the bed right, without disturbing them at all. So I completely resonated with that.

So next I want to talk about how SleepEasy is different from other sleep methods.

Dr Richard Shane

Well, almost all other sleep methods, what they're doing is they're taking traditional relaxation and trying to apply those to sleep. So one difference has to do with relaxation. So, as I mentioned a moment ago, most other methods, it's relax your feet, legs, hands, and arms. Those are the outer parts of your body. SleepEasy gives you a simple way to calm deep inside your body. It's easier and more effective.

And another difference I referred to a moment ago but I want to just clarify, it has to do with your breathing. So almost everybody in the sleep field, they're talking about deep, slower abdominal breathing or counting breaths. Now, those are really good for daytime anxiety reduction, but they're too much effort for sleep. We need something easier. And what that is is the way you naturally breathe when you're asleep. And I talked about that.

So another major difference is people commonly visualize being in a peaceful place. However, a lot of times, visualization is just another form of thinking, and it doesn't get you to sleep. So SleepEasy doesn't use visualization. Here's what's easier, when your head's on your pillow, you don't need to visualize your pillow. You just feel it. Similarly, with this sleep process, you don't have to visualize, just feel the comfortable body sensations.

And then the last way this is very different from well known methods is some sleep methods recommend if you're not asleep in 20 minutes, get up. Now, they're saying that because they don't want you to lie in bed anxious. However, having to get up often makes people more anxious. Some people even call it torture.

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So with SleepEasy, even if you're not asleep or back to sleep as soon as you'd like, you can have the feeling of comfort deep in your chest and abdomen. Your mind likes that feeling and rests in it. That's a comfortable connection between your body and mind that feels good and healing. It's a feeling I call leaning into sleep. And that reduces anxiety about not yet being asleep, which then makes sleep easier.

Meagen Gibson

So you say that SleepEasy creates the neurophysiology of safety. Can you describe how for me?

Dr Richard Shane

Thank you for asking. Well, the feeling that makes sleep easier is feeling safe. Not just external safety, like having your doors locked, but a feeling of being comfortable, protected and safe inside yourself. But if you have conditions in your life that are stressful, how do you feel safe inside yourself? So, many of your participants have likely heard of the vagus nerve. So I want to explain that now in very simple terms.

The vagus nerve is the longest nerve system in the body. In Latin, vagus means wandering. Because starting from just two thick stems rooted in the cerebellum and brainstem, the vagus nerve has branches that wander through your tongue, your pharynx which is your throat, your vocal cords, lungs, heart, stomach, intestines and glands that produce anti stress enzymes and hormones.

So SleepEasy gives you a very simple way to deeply relax your tongue, throat and heart and through the vagus nerve, this signals your lungs, calming your breathing and your heart, lowering your heart rate and blood pressure, also signaling your gut and brain to ease into parasympathetic relaxation and that feeling of inner safety that opens the pathway to sleep.

But I want to now explain it with an analogy. How do you feel safe if the conditions in your life are stressful? Well, consider this example. If you were outdoors in a storm, you might have to be braced, but then when you come inside, you can calm down, even though there may still be a storm going on outside. So the key understanding is indoors, protected from the weather.

So SleepEasy gives you this way to create comfort deep inside your body, brings your awareness inside your body, which creates that feeling of being protected and safe inside you. Like being indoors, protected from the weather, away from all the things going on outside in your life. It's like having a safe, secret place to go to inside yourself.

And also the quiet inner sound and feeling of your sleep breath, that's the sound and feeling of your breath when you feel deeply relaxed and safe. So hearing and feeling that sound helps create the neurophysiology of safety in your nervous system and that leads to sleep. One other we'll describe how this calms your heart.

Your breath is in your lungs and your lungs surround your heart like wrapping around your heart. It's a feeling of protecting your heart and that feeling of protection creates this feeling of safety in your heart. Heart then sends electrical, chemical, and even magnetic signals through your body, signaling it's safe to rest.

[00:16:41] Meagen Gibson

I think we often forget that we need to carefully allow our bodies to feel that. We assume it's just going to happen for a lot of us and it doesn't through no fault of our own, it's not like we did something to purposely dismantle that system. Life circumstances and experiences all lend to that. So how does your method help people quiet the mind without meditation?

Dr Richard Shane

Most people, when they try to quiet their mind, it's either like wrestling with the mind or maybe throwing a lasso around the mind, trying to rein it in. But all of that just creates negative resistance in your mind. Here's the key that makes this easier. We hold tension in our bodies and in mind, not wanting to feel that, it's active. Mind pulling away from body tension, that's a root cause of mental activity.

Now sometimes, that's mind thinking thoughts, but other times it's just like the mind switch is turned on. Body tension plus the mind switch turned on makes sleep difficult. So we just reverse that. Create comfort, deep in your chest and abdomen. Your mind likes that feeling and rests in it. It's a feeling of your mind and body coming back together in comfortable integration.

It's a feeling of original mind body wholeness that existed before the stresses of life, and that mind body integration gets your nervous system to respond, oh, this feels good, this feels right. And that calms your nervous system on a fundamental level, much more so than relaxing your entire body. Now, what I just said is so central, I want to say it again.

You create comfort deep in your chest and abdomen. Your mind likes that feeling and rests in it. A feeling of your mind and body coming back together in comfortable integration. A feeling of original mind body wholeness that existed before the stressors of life. And that mind body integration gets your nervous system to respond, oh, this feels good, this feels right. And that calms your nervous system on a fundamental level, much more so than relaxing your entire body. And that leads to sleep. Can I say a little bit more?

Meagen Gibson

Yeah.

Dr Richard Shane

Okay. So specifically about how this gets mind to become quiet, I'm going to use an unusual example, but it will soon make sense. When a bird flies, it flaps its wings. When it lands, it can rest. When your mind is thinking, it's like flying around, thinking about the things in your life. So with SleepEasy, you don't try to quiet your mind. In the midst of your mind being active, you get this feeling of comfort deep in your chest and abdomen. Mind likes that feeling and rests in it, like I've said before, like resting on a soft pillow inside your body.

Mind then becomes quiet because it's resting in safe comfort inside you. It's not outside you flying around. When a bird lands, it can stop flapping its wings. And mind resting in that comfort becomes quiet by itself without effort and without needing meditation. But I certainly want to add, meditation has so many benefits, but it's often just too much effort for sleep and a lot of people say it's difficult for them. So for sleep, we need something easier.

[00:20:38] Meagen Gibson

I've done a lot of study on trauma and we have another conference that we do on trauma and I know one of the things about mindfulness and meditation is that if you've suffered from trauma, it can often be really challenging to just be alone with your thoughts and meditation. So can SleepEasy help people who have trouble sleeping because of trauma?

Dr Richard Shane

Absolutely. Now, I want to point out that certainly applies to what people usually think of as trauma, you know, horrific accidents and life circumstances like divorces and such. But what's important for people to know is that the field of trauma treatment broadens the definition to include the extreme stresses of life and that's traumatic for people.

So this applies to the narrow definition of trauma and the broader and here's the key, because most people, again, they try to deal with it in their mind and emotions. But as I said before, mind and emotions don't have physical form, like trying to chase a cloud. So the key is an important element of trauma is the uncomfortable body sensations of trauma. They're held in the heart and other core body sensations.

And SleepEasy gives you a simple and effective way to bring comfort and healing to your heart and to core body discomfort. That calms your heart, calms your nervous system and that helps calm your trauma and leads to sleep. SleepEasy also gives people other ways to help heal and calm trauma during the day.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. So I would love it if you could teach our conference participants one of the neurological switches that they could use tonight.

Dr Richard Shane

I am so glad you asked that because this is my favorite part of interviews because what I'm about to teach everybody, it's almost ridiculously simple and a lot of people have never thought of it before and this will be something people will be able to use tonight.

So a body sensation that acts like a neurological switch is your tongue. Now, with the tongue's fantastically intricate and microscopic motions, it's one of the most complex muscles in the body. As such, it has more nerves than most other muscles. So allowing your tongue to relax, spreads relaxation through your nervous system.

Now, many people haven't previously been aware of their tongue, but what's true for many people is they press their tongue against the roof of their mouth or their teeth, kind of like bracing against stress. However, pressing your tongue creates more tension and stress. So let's do something that will help you be able to allow your tongue to relax.

This is going to take just 20 seconds and you do it just one time here, not on the way to sleep. So right now, everybody make a fist and hold it tightly. And notice that it takes effort to keep doing that. Now allow your hand to open and relax. And that's not trying to make your fist relax, it's actually less effort to let go of tension. Yes.

[00:23:58] Meagen Gibson

Yes.

Dr Richard Shane

So it's like that with your tongue. So everyone, right now, even with your eyes open, be aware of your tongue and allow it to relax a little. Like allowing your fist to open and relax. And even if your tongue is already relaxed, you can allow it to relax a little more. You don't make it relax, you allow it. And even if you have an old habit pattern of tensing your tongue, realize it takes effort to keep tensing.

So just allow your tongue to relax. And so everyone, through the rest of this interview and through the rest of this sleep conference, as you're listening to people, periodically be aware of your tongue. And any time you notice your tongue is pressing, feel that it takes effort to do that. So you don't try to make it relaxed, you allow it to relax. And even if your tongue's already relaxed, just allow it to relax a little more.

And then feeling that through this session and through the conference, you'll become familiar with that feeling, which will make sleep easier tonight. So on the way to sleep, just allow your tongue to relax a little in addition to whatever you do. And it's not that that is magically complete for sleep, but it will absolutely help and make sleep easier.

Meagen Gibson

It's fascinating. I had no idea how much tension was in my tongue until you actually let us do that exercise. I was really jamming my tongue into the roof of my mouth. So it's much better now. Thank you.

Dr Richard Shane

So I said, everybody notice your tongue through this conference. Well, let's broaden it to in life. Just go through your day and just have part of your awareness noticing your tongue. And if it's tense, don't get annoyed that it's tense. It's just old habit and you don't make it relaxed. Just give it permission to relax and pretty soon your tongue will like being in that relaxed position and it just calms you all over.

Meagen Gibson

I'd love it if you could tell us a little bit about The SleepEasy app.

Dr Richard Shane

I've been developing and refining The SleepEasy Method for over 25 years. And for the past three years, I've worked with a world class team of experts to create the SleepEasy mobile app to deliver the SleepEasy program. This is different, completely different from all other sleep methods and apps because it feels like the way sleep actually happens and people say it's the most effective sleep app they've ever used.

So the goals, the obvious goals, are to fall asleep more quickly and easily, even in the midst of stress. Sleep more deeply. Meagen, there's actually an explainable way to sleep more deeply. So you sleep longer with fewer unwanted awakenings. Then the one that's major for most people, if you wake up

too early, how to fall back to sleep more quickly and easily. And how to have your mind become quiet and calm anxiety and alertness in a way that's easy.

[00:27:01]

And one of the hallmarks of this is most people sleep better the first night. Now, obviously not completely better, but better enough that it becomes encouraging. And if anyone's currently using sleep medication and they want to be able to sleep well without it, the app has a program that enables you to reduce and eliminate the need for sleep medication without withdrawal.

Now, the way the app works is the main part of the app is a 14 day core treatment program. Each day has a brief daytime session, averaging just 10 or 11 minutes, and it's designed to give you new knowledge about your mind, body and sleep. And then the 14 day core treatment program guides you through a progression of three sleep recordings, each moving to a deeper level. And the sleep recordings are available in both male and female voices. And the app offers 15 background sleep sounds, many of which come from world renowned sound healers and sound engineers.

And The SleepEasy Method feels so natural, you can also easily use it without the recording, feeling it in your own way. However, even when people use the method without the recording, most people like to periodically return to using the recording because it deepens the neurological pathway to sleep inside you. And that feels so good. Then there's a screen on the app that lists 35 different sleep challenges. You click on the ones that apply to you, and you get programs specific for those sleep challenges.

So here are some of the programs. How to fall asleep. Fall back to sleep. And sleep more deeply. Then, if you have sleep apnea, how to become more comfortable with your CPAP device. If you travel, how to sleep better in different time zones. How to sleep well if you work unusual hours. How to sleep well if you're on call. Calming pain and headaches. Restless leg syndrome. Calming your nightmares. Post traumatic stress disorder, trauma and sleep. Bipolar disorder and sleep. Sexual abuse and sleep. Menopause and sleep. Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder and sleep. How to deal with concerns about world conditions so they don't interfere with sleep.

And the app also has a program to help heal the core fear that's at the root of much sleep difficulty. And in the resource section, you have access to an extensive library of content which includes 26 sleep hygiene topics, and each of them contain information not found in other presentations on sleep hygiene.

Also, the SleepEasy app gives you a simple way to calm stress and anxiety and feel good during the day when your eyes are open and you're in the midst of activity. So it doesn't even require a separate timeout, like most other sleep methods. The app has over 130 recordings that are a vast resource to help you sleep easily and deeply.

And this SleepEasy app can help you sleep well, which will change your life.

Meagen Gibson

I know with the vast amount of experience that you have in this field and the way that you've been able to help yourself and restore your own sleep, that this is something that you know is going to benefit people if they engage with it.

[00:30:37] Dr Richard Shane

One of the things that makes me passionate is I do psychotherapy also, general psychotherapy, and that helps people change. But sleep, it changes every area of life. And so it's great leverage for if people are concerned, I want my life to be better. And then even approaching that becomes complex and that becomes overwhelming. It's like if you're not sleeping well, learn to sleep well. That one change takes care of so much.

And I want to make a comment about how the media portrays sleep, because the media and a lot of books, they often talk about the damaging effect of poor sleep. Now, that's helpful for people who are able to sleep, but they don't think it's important, so it kind of scares them into making more time for sleep. However, for people who have trouble sleeping, thinking about the damaging effects, that increases their anxiety, makes sleep even more difficult.

So it's much more helpful to focus on the benefits of good sleep. So I just want to list them because it's a wonderful list. When you sleep better, you think more clearly, you have more energy, you're more productive, you have less stress, anxiety, depression and anger. Your physical health improves and the quality of your work and personal relationships improve. And people often use that term life changing, but usually it's just like an empty slogan. However, because good sleep is one change that improves so many areas of life, it is truly life changing. So when people hear that list of benefits, most people go, wow, there's one thing that brings all those benefits? I want some of that.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Which is why we made an entire conference about it, because we want people to really feel the effects of those benefits, not just solve the problems that they're having, but actually get all the benefits of what good sleep can provide. Dr Richard Shane, how can people find out more about you, The SleepEasy Method and your app?

Dr Richard Shane

They can go to sleep easymethod.com and that has a lot of useful information and then also a link how to get the app, that is sleep easymethod, all one word, .com.

Meagen Gibson

Dr Richard Shane, thank you very much for being with us today.

Dr Richard Shane

Thank you very much. And I look forward to attending the conference and learning from the other speakers.

Meagen Gibson

Thanks so much.

Dr Richard Shane

You, too. Have a wonderful rest of your day, Meagen. Bye.