



Wide Awake: A Memoir of Insomnia

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A fourth-generation insomniac, Patricia Morrisroe decided that the only way she'd ever conquer her lifelong sleep disorder was by becoming an expert on the subject. So, armed with half a century of personal experience and a journalist's curiosity, she set off to explore one of life's greatest mysteries: sleep. *Wide Awake* is the eye-opening account of Morrisroe's quest—a compelling memoir that blends science, culture, and business to tell the story of why she—and forty million other Americans—can't sleep at night.

Over the course of three years of research and reporting, Morrisroe talks to sleep doctors, drug makers, psychiatrists, anthropologists, hypnotherapists, “wake experts,” mattress salesmen, a magician, an astronaut, and even a reindeer herder. She spends an uncomfortable night wired up in a sleep lab. She tries “sleep restriction” and “brain music therapy.” She buys a high-end sound machine, custom-made ear plugs, and a “quiet” house in the country to escape her noisy neighbors in the city. She attends a continuing medical education course in Las Vegas, where she discovers that doctors are among the most sleep-deprived people in the country. She travels to Sonoma, California, where she attends a Dream Ball costumed as her “dream self.” To fulfill a childhood fantasy, she celebrates Christmas Eve two hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle, in the famed Icehotel tossing and turning on an ice bed. Finally, after traveling the globe, she finds the answer to her insomnia right around the corner from her apartment in New York City.

A mesmerizing mix of personal insight, science and social observation, **Wide Awake** examines the role of sleep in our increasingly hyperactive culture. For the millions who suffer from sleepless nights and hazy caffeine-filled days, this humorous, thought-provoking and ultimately hopeful book is an essential bedtime companion. It does, however, come with a warning: Reading it will promote wakefulness.

Wide Awake: A Memoir of Insomnia Details

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Author : Patricia Morrisroe

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John says

Quite well-written, and I'd read more by the author. However, on occasion it goes a bit deep into medical-scientific theory; I was forced to skim those parts. Still, a worthwhile addition to the self-help-exploration genre: *Helping Me Help Myself*, *All in My Head: An Epic Quest to Cure an Unrelenting, Totally Unreasonable, And Only Slightly Enlightening Headache*, etc.

William says

I put this book on my to read list back when I was having a lot of trouble sleeping. Hoping I could get some insights into overcoming the problem. That was back in 2010 and I'm happy to report that I no longer suffer from sleeplessness.

But this turned out to be a really good book. not only chronicling the authors struggles with insomnia but all of humankind's efforts to eradicate it. From the Billions made annually by big pharma pushing worthless sleeping pills...pills proven in sturdy after study to increase sleep time an average of only 11 minutes more than placebo's and to work less well than amphetamines! The book covers the history of sleep and all of our attempts to get a good nights one through bedding, snoring cessation devices, dental apparatus, and electrodes. The author describes sleep clinics, dream interpreters, and some of the truly bizarre lengths people will go to to get a good nights sleep. The book is very informative and entertaining. The author conquers her insomnia in the end just as I did mine. I wont spoil it and tell you how she did it but I can tell you how I did. I retired, so I can sleep all day long if I want too!

Shirin says

Now that I've read this book, I can't remember what I thought it was going to be when I picked it up. Ironically, after the first few entertaining pages, I was having a lot of trouble getting through the first part of the book without wanting to go to sleep. The history of sleep and the science/pharmacy that it inspired was a bit dry but afterwards, the second half of the book really picked it. It's a fast read with a lot of interesting facts and tidbits. I'm glad I perserved through it. I don't know if I'll ever want to read it again but I am glad I read it the once. The book is definitely handy as a reference for anyone needing information of this sort, whoever they be. When the author got to the section about house-hunting, it seemed a little bit non-sequitir, compared to the rest of the memoir, but in the end, the author does do a nice job of tying everything together.

I originally had purchased a copy of the book to give to my best friend as a gift, the subject manner would be something she and I could appreciate. I read my copy in advance to see if it was a smart gift choice after all. I'm not sure she'd like it enough to warrant the gift but perhaps I'll let her borrow my copy if she ever seems interested.

The one thing I took away from the book, more than anything else: How does this woman afford everything? All these exotic trips, classes, seminars? I couldn't devote this much to my own sleep study, and that upsets me.

I will say the most entertaining section came towards the end, interpreting dreams. The most interesting and enjoyable: learning about the Sami in the Arctic Circle.

"How can you prove whether at this moment we are sleeping and all our thoughts are a dream; or whether or not we are awake and talking to one another in the waking state?" -- Plato, as quoted by Alan :)

Hannah Jo Parker says

I had high hopes for this book, as someone who enjoys memoirs and has struggled with insomnia most of her adult life, but I ended up disappointed. I consider myself a sympathetic/empathetic person, but I lost my patience with the author over lines like, "I've never taken a nap in my life and have always been highly suspicious of people who do..." I am not much of a nap taker, either, but I think it's ridiculous to NEVER take one if you truly are going without sleep at night. And, it's ridiculous to be "suspicious" of people who take them. You know who I'm suspicious of? People who say they've never taken a nap, especially people who were children once -- children who took naps.

Jennifer says

Too technical at times; definitely a cure for insomnia at others. But I liked this one well enough. It was good to read someone else's insomnia experience, if only to reassure myself that my case of insomnia is not so bad.

Ashley says

An ok read. The author details her struggle with insomnia and her quest to find a cure. She tries meditation, medication, a sleep study, and moving, just to name a few.

While there was some interesting medical info in the book, I felt like the author was whining most of the time. Obviously wealthy, she's able to indulge in treatments that the majority of the population wouldn't be able to. The most glaring example of this is her and her husband's house search to find a county home that may aid in her search to find a good night's sleep. In particular, they looked at home next to one owned by Ralph Lauren and one in the same neighborhood as Martha Stewart. Really? You think that will help anyone relate to you and your struggle with waking up in the middle of the night and not being able to go back to sleep? Not exactly how I'd choose to endear myself to my audience.

I also found the dream-interpretation chapter a little annoying. It was interesting to hear from the so-called experts, but Morrisroe unfortunately tried her hand at the same, with results that made me laugh out loud at the sheer ridiculousness. The gist: she had a dream that she was being blocked from a meditation garden by a pit bull handled by two men. The dog had a spike collar made of popsicles. Somehow, Morrisroe decided that the popsicle was a metaphor for the pope and her Catholic teachings and the dog, obviously, symbolizes Catholic dogma. Um, ok. I know it's a very subjective "science", but seriously?

I wish Morrisroe had stayed out of the story a little more, as the science and history behind sleep disorders was actually quite interesting.

Jennifer says

This book is a great read, especially for anyone suffering with insomnia. Unlike other books about sleeping problems, this author incorporates humor into her writing. Her wit will definitely keep readers turning the pages, even if it is to skip over a couple of really dry spots. Otherwise, I found myself cracking up at least once in every chapter, especially when she talks about her buddy Alan. The only thing that I did not like about this book was her house-hunting quest. At the beginning of the book I had the impression that she was of a moderate income level, but when she is looking for a home it is clear that she and her husband have money to spare, and probably lots of it. I do not like reading about real people moving into homes directly next door to Ralph Lauren; it's very pretentious. Overall, I would recommend this book to absolutely anyone who seriously needs help sleeping.

Amber says

I really enjoyed Mrs. Morrisroe's story of her protracted battle with insomnia. I have had a bizarre form of insomnia mixed with becoming nocturnal since puberty, so I can relate! I was both impressed and a little appalled by the sheer number of treatments and facilities dedicated to solving the insomnia epidemic that seems to be sweeping the world. The information about the various medications that the author tried left me with the same unease about sleeping pills that I've always had. I was lucky enough to find one that works (thought it still can't make me sleep during the night) and doesn't seem to have too many side-effects - but now I'm wondering if the side-effects are just waiting for awhile before rearing their ugly heads.

To cut a long ramble short, since I can't help but relate my own experiences with insomnia, I really enjoyed this book and I'm glad the Mrs. Morrisroe wrote it. It makes you feel less alone when it's 4am and you're sitting in that quiet bubble of sleeplessness.

Laura Hancock says

I loved this book, a combination of memoir and good journalism. Morrisroe, in her 50s, has struggled with insomnia her entire life.

Personally, I can relate: I struggle falling asleep. Morrisroe can fall asleep but in the middle of the night she wakes and cannot return to sleep.

In fact, she's a fourth generation insomniac, and I was touched by the stories of her family members' insomnia, especially those of her beloved grandpa.

Yet Morrisroe writes with sharp wit, especially as she describes her adventures with overnight sleep studies, napping service companies, insomnia drugs, dream therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, hypnosis, music therapy, mattresses that promise a good night's sleep and even a second home in the country. But the book's more than a funny story about an overnight sleep study: Morrisroe parses through research on sleep and sleepiness using her fine-tuned background in journalism to help novices like myself understand what really can be known for sure on the subject. I've learned about the iffy science, business interests and New Age hokus pokus behind insomnia. Just as important, however, I learned that freedom from insomnia requires

solutions that are individual and could involve some of the very solutions Morrisroe questions. Morrisroe ultimately finds an effective solution to insomnia. You'll have to read it to find out what that is!

Traci Nicole says

I found it to be really interesting. It was educational without being textbook dry. Well, in the beginning anyway. By chapter 10, I was just ready for it to be over.

Leah says

This book presents an overview of the history and the current state of the science of sleep and dreams, overlaid with (and motivated by) the author's own attempts to get her lifelong insomnia under control. I've had some struggles with insomnia myself (who hasn't, really?) so it was particularly interesting to me on that level. She did a great job of presenting the science of sleep and dreams, and least from a layperson's point of view, and it was made all the more sympathetic by her openness about how her insomnia was affecting her daily life.

Where she lost me, though, was when she veered away from the science and into the woo. Spoiler alert: the author's insomnia is never really cured, but through meditation, she becomes better able to deal with it somehow? The book isn't really clear - it ends with her being up in the middle of the night, enjoying the beauty of the full moon, so obviously she hasn't conquered it. Anyway, I'm glad she's feeling more in control of her sleep issues, and that meditation has helped her. I just felt that the book could've done without the chakras and the Ayurvedic medicine and so forth.

Craig says

Good, but the internal organization is all over the place.

Keith Akers says

If you are looking for a general overview of theories of insomnia and practical advice as to how to deal with it, this is a good place to start. But what makes "Wide Awake" really good is that it is a scream to read. I was not seeking it out because it was funny. But I finished the book, reading it like it was a novel, because it was funny.

I checked this book out because I was interested in the subject of insomnia and wanted more information and ideas as to how to treat it. What I got was something which might actually be even better, a personal memoir about the author's struggles with insomnia. You get a quick tour of the major ideas and theories from a very personal point of view: that of an author who has been there and done that. Topics include sleeping pills, sleep clinics, cognitive behavioral therapy, sleep courses, hypnotherapy, wake-promoting drugs, shift-work disorder, sleep apnea, mattresses, power napping, searching for a quieter neighborhood, trying to sleep in an

ice hotel north of the arctic circle, meditation, and the study of dreams.

Morrisroe is on a mission, to get some sleep, and so it is a succession of stories as she tries one thing after another. None of them are completely without merit, but none of them give her satisfaction until a combination of factors at the end finally seems to get her back on track. I won't reveal the ending, but I am not convinced that what worked for her will work for everyone, and she doesn't seem to think so either, and certainly isn't promoting it. In fact, it's not even clear what it was, exactly, that helped.

She leaves the impression that there is no real "science" of sleep. Even the best, brightest, and smartest of those in the field are still struggling to make sense of the whole thing. The really smart people understand that while we've got quite a bit of interesting research, there are just a whole bunch of things that we still don't really know -- like why we sleep at all, for example.

Because it's a memoir, and because the author doesn't present herself as an expert, she isn't committed to defending or attacking this or that idea or set of ideas. In the end this is actually more helpful for us than it would be if she had just tried to write a more systematic treatise. Thanks for the book!

Jes Pedroza says

"Wide Awake" is a thoroughly researched book on just that...., staying wide awake and having difficulty sleeping for the recommended 8 hours.

The author suffers from insomnia and searches for the answers to her own questions that doctors can not seem to give her. Because there is so little research done in the field of sleep (especially after REM was discovered), the few scattered studies that exist do not paint a clear picture of how do deal with problems as they arise. It is however recognized that sleep is very, very important!

She gives examples of the dire consequences due to sleep deprivation, including the Libby Zion case, where over worked residents made poor decisions, leading to Zion's death which eventually changed US law to limit the hours a doctor can work in a day.

Morrisroe tries every pill under FDI approval but finds them to have scary side effects without actually helping her sleep. She turns to hypnosis, music therapy, purchasing a new "sleep situation" (e.g new mattress, pillow and house!) and finally yoga, which in the end, aids immensely.

It's great to see her finally get some relief and inform readers on what they may not know about sleep but most definitely should!

Sarah says

I've been an insomniac for as long as I can remember. And I've been a bookworm even longer. Why I've never thought to read books about insomnia is beyond me. But here I am, doing it now, in an effort to get some better zzz's.

This book is half memoir, half sleep science. Morrisroe uses her own insomnia as a platform to explore all

the facts and theories and myths about sleep, which ends up being a pretty cool exercise. There's definitely a lot about sleep that I didn't know, and a lot about sleep that nobody knows.

As it turns out, sleep is a mystery wrapped in a riddle. Despite the heroic efforts of our best and brightest, we still don't even know why we sleep, let alone what sleep "disorders" might be about. Everyone has their own theories, of course, from Freudian psychologists and Hobbesian neuroscientists to mystical shamans, religious fanatics, and anthropologists... But when it comes down to it, we truly have no consensus, even in terms of the basics like why we dream or how our bodies determine how much sleep we need, and when. We don't know how much sleep is the healthiest, or why we die without it.

Although this book didn't offer me many answers in terms of my own sleep woes as I was hoping it might, it was an interesting read nonetheless. And on a final note, there were a couple sections that got a bit boring, but that may actually be a good thing for insomniacs like me looking for something to rock them quietly to sleep.
