



WHILE YOU WERE sleeping

Ever wondered what your dreams really mean?
Here's how to unlock the secret life of your slumber

AS YOU SNUGGLE UNDER YOUR DOONA, ready for a relaxing night's shut-eye, your brain is firing up for a busy night of dreaming. By morning you'll have had around five dreams, even though you'll only remember your last one before waking. They can seem pretty wacky, but dreams are actually a fascinating sneak peek into your unconscious mind. And if you take the time to tap into what they

mean, you may end up winning at (waking) life – and no, we don't mean by dreaming up the right Lotto numbers.

"Dreams are incredibly powerful because if you can decode them, you will catch your unconscious mind at its own game, and you'll gain insights and wisdom through that," says dream therapist Jane Teresa Anderson. Her new book, *The Dream Handbook* (Hachette, \$19.99),

shows you how to interpret your dreams for a happier, calmer way of living. Want to make your real-life dreams come true? Then read on to find out what happens when the lights go out.

DREAM ON...

Believe it or not, we all dream – for as much as two hours a night – but the real trick is remembering all of them. We tend to recall

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only the dreams we're having just as we wake up from a sleep.

Dreams are your unconscious mind's attempt to process the events, people and experiences that have happened over the last 24 to 48 hours. "The point of dreaming seems to be to update your mindset," says Anderson. "Dreams address problems and conflicts you meet in waking life, looking to make sense of it all."

WHY SO WEIRD?

When you dream, the emotional parts of your brain set to work sifting through the events of the last couple of days. Meanwhile, the rational parts of your mind are deactivated, so they can't butt in to edit the images, which partly explains the weirdness factor. "It's not the logical part of your mind, but the deeper unconscious part, that is creating your dreams," Anderson explains.

Dreams also show you what you fear, and your body experiences that fear as a real adrenaline rush, which is why they can seem so frightening. But they're not all scary, and if you look a little closer at these night-time movies, Anderson says you can learn a lot about yourself, as they reveal your unconscious mind at work.

"This gives you the power to understand your mindset so deeply that you can make changes and basically live a bigger, better, richer, more meaningful life," says Anderson.

Your job now is to sleep more (um, yes, please) so that you have more dreams, remember them better and then figure out what they might mean to you.

YOUR DREAM DECODING PLAN

If you want to better understand your dreams, start with these nighttime rituals.

❖ **Get more sleep** Yep, more shut-eye really does equal more dreams. If you sleep for the magical eight hours a night, you could expect to have about five dreams in that time, which become more vivid, interesting and longer as the night goes on. You know the drill for better slumber – put screens away an hour or two before bed, create a darkened, cool space to sleep in, and actually get to bed at a reasonable hour to give yourself more opportunity to catch those essential zzzs.

❖ **Encourage recall** So, now you're sleeping like a baby, how do you work on remembering dreams better? There are a few techniques that work, starting with reminding yourself to remember the dream, just before you go to sleep. Try not to jump straight up, instead set two alarms, the first 10 minutes before you really have to get moving. Snooze peacefully so you can hopefully recall snippets of your dream. Another technique is more drastic, but it can help with recall. Drink lots of water before bed, so you will have to wake up to go to the toilet, giving yourself the chance to catch a dream.

❖ **Write it down** Buy a beautiful journal, keep it by your bed with a pen and commit to writing something in your dream journal every morning. Even if you can't recall the dream, the act of writing will eventually jog your memory. "Write down whatever you remember – it might just be a little bit, but that act of writing it down will help it come back," says Anderson.

❖ **Choose a dream** After a week, pick out one dream to work on. In your dream journal, use the right hand page to record the dream and keep the left free for interpreting the action.

❖ **Decode the dream** Start by summing it up in one sentence. For example, "I dreamt I was trying to climb a mountain, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't reach the top." Then simplify that again into an even vaguer sentence, such as, "I was worried about not achieving something." That vague sentence will probably relate to something that has happened over the past few days.

❖ **Dream alchemy** Now reimagine your dream, and get yourself to the top of the mountain so that you feel really good about it. This is what Anderson calls "dream alchemy." "This trains your brain to get on top of whatever is stopping you from achieving what you want to achieve," she explains. "It's a two-step process. The first is interpreting the dream, and then having understood that, the second step is applying the dream alchemy, which is the exercise to reprogram the aspects of your mindset that you'd like to reset for better outcomes in your life." ❖

Sound familiar?

Your dreams and their symbols are unique to you, but there are many dreams we share. Check out this list of common dreams and interpretations

YOU'VE LOST SOMETHING PRECIOUS

Decoded: Your way forward may be blocked by the loss of self-esteem, identity, a lover, a job, health or wealth. You may be feeling under-valued, or experiencing a loss of personal power.

YOU DREAM ABOUT STORMY WEATHER

Decoded: You could feel blocked by anger or grief you have denied or not expressed, or may feel threatened, burdened or fearing change.

YOU GO ON A CAR JOURNEY

Decoded: You may feel as though you are driven by beliefs or motivations that are not serving you well.

YOU'RE RUNNING LATE

Decoded: You might be held back by a fear of failure, perfectionism or are needing approval.

YOU'RE UNPREPARED FOR AN EXAM

Decoded: You may feel tested in one area of your life, reacting with attitudes straight out of school, including worries about performance or feeling judged.

YOUR TEETH ARE FALLING OUT

Decoded: You might feel insecure and unable to speak up and have your say.