

Shut your mouth

Mark Strong's face enduring KGB torture as "Jim Prideaux" in the recent film version of John Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* lives on long in the memory after the cinema lights go up, as does that of his shattered demeanour living post-MI6 as a caravan-dwelling grammar school teacher. Terrible things are done to Jim Prideaux and continuous assault by loud noise may superficially seem the least of it. But don't underestimate its power; the impact of the consequential sleep deprivation is horrendous.

That's why intelligence agencies the world over use it in interrogations when they can get away with it. Sleep deprivation can break you. Its psychological effects are well established in the research literature, from cognitive problems similar to those of drunkenness all the way through to nervous breakdown at the extreme. Chronic sleep deprivation has been convincingly linked to physical problems such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease too.

There are two domestic sleep deprivation triggers most of us would have experienced at some time. Crying babies that keep us up all night is one. Few parents haven't felt like zombies, been driven to tearful desperation or developed a hair-trigger temper for this reason at some point during their children's early years. But kids grow up and the problem resolves. Not so the other domestic trigger, snoring.

Napoleon, Churchill and Queen Victoria are usually invoked as the great snorers of history. The common element, barrel-shaped bodies, is obvious. But there are less obvious and more current candidates. Tom Cruise, for example, reportedly converted a spare room into a "snoratorium" after his marriage to Katie Holmes, displacing panic rooms and fallout shelters as

the de rigueur California real estate feature of the moment. "Sometimes it just starts off as a temporary measure, but then word spreads and now everyone with the space wants one," the London *Daily Telegraph* quoted Hollywood real estate agent Pierre Stoops as saying. "Some rooms have fish tanks to cover the noise and soothe the snorer."

Soothe the snorer! What about the snoree? A friend relayed how she'd curled up tearily on the hearth of her fireplace one night this week, fleeing her boyfriend's nasal slumber thunder to try to get some

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sleep. She was still picking wood fragments out of her hair the next day. The snoratorium didn't save the Holmes-Cruise marriage, as it turned out, and I doubt it would save my friend's or anyone else's either. What sort of marriage could survive spouses sleeping in separate rooms for long anyway, let alone the lounge room hearth? But breathing retraining might!

Canberra has its own breathing expert, Tess Graham, who from her old inner south physiotherapy practice retrained thousands of people – young and old, singers, athletes, even at one stage a squad of Canberra Raiders – in how to beat snoring and related problems like allergies, asthma, broken sleep and dry

mouth. Graham has moved up the food chain now, no longer training people directly but rather spreading the word in seminars, conference talks and via her just published book *Relief from Snoring and Sleep Apnoea* (Penguin). It could just as well have been called *Take Your Ventolin Puffer and Hurl It from the Closest Cliff. Or Wake Up Feeling Like You've Actually Slept for a Change. Or even Love Your Spouse Instead of Wanting to Take Their Head Off With A Chainsaw at 3am.*

Tess Graham's essential message is simple: shut your mouth. And once you've shut it, learn to take small, slow infrequent breaths rather than frequent great, gawping gulps of air. It works. My family all did the training years ago when Tess was still teaching personally. Our then young daughter's asthma stopped within days and never came back. And how shall I put it diplomatically? Chez Wallace has not needed anything like a snoratorium since.

Graham's book sets out how you can retrain your own breathing yourself and it's revolutionary in its simplicity. Cardiologist Ross Walker in the foreword points out how most recent interventions to fix snoring and sleep apnoea have been technological and "intrusive" in nature, with simple and natural ways of fixing the problem being ignored. Graham outlines straightforward changes in breathing habits which, if maintained, soothe the problem away.

Once you've made the switch there's a sudden awareness of the number of rampant mouth breathers around you. Sadly, they tend to look sick, tired, stupid or a combination of all three, often with protruding front teeth (another side effect of mouth breathing). This is one of the few occasions where I feel it's fair to say, shut up and take my word for it.

