

When Your Mind Won't Switch Off

*Five gentle ways to quiet the 2am loop
for the newly single mum whose brain won't let her rest*

I was you. I found my way through. Now I come back for you.

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Your brain isn't broken. It's on guard.

It's late. The house is finally quiet. The kids are asleep, the dishes can wait, and for the first time all day, nothing needs you.

And that's exactly when it starts. The replaying. The rehearsing. The what-ifs about money, the kids, him, the future. The conversation you should have had. The one you're dreading next week. Around and around, while the clock gets crueller.

Here's what no one tells you: this isn't a thinking problem. It's a safety problem.

If you've spent months or years scanning a relationship for signs of trouble — reading moods, bracing for the next conflict, staying one step ahead — your nervous system learned to treat alertness as survival. It did that to protect you. And it doesn't switch off just because the relationship ended.

At night, when everything goes still, all that scanning has nowhere to go. So it turns inward. The loop is your brain still standing guard — it just hasn't been told the war is over.

If your mind races the moment your head hits the pillow — that is not weakness, and it is not failure.

It is a nervous system that kept you safe, still doing its job. You don't need to fight it. You only need to show it, gently, that tonight it can stand down.

That's what this little guide is for. Not journaling. Not "clearing your mind." Not anything that asks you to sit up, turn on a light, or try hard at midnight — because you won't, and you shouldn't have to.

Just five small things you can do lying down, in the dark, exactly as you are. You don't need all five. Tonight, you only need one.

ONE

The Double Breath

This is the fastest way we know to manually calm a nervous system — and it works even on the nights you don't believe it will.

Tonight, you might try:

Breathe in through your nose. Then, at the top, take one more small sip of air — a second little inhale on top of the first.

Now let it all out through your mouth, long and slow, like a sigh you've been holding all day.

Repeat three to five times. That's it.

The long exhale is the part doing the work — it's a direct signal to your body that the threat has passed. You may have already done this without realising: it's the same breath your body makes after crying. Your body already knows how to do this. You're just doing it on purpose.

You have spent so long holding your breath — in hallways, in conversations, in the seconds before checking your phone.

This is permission to let it go.

TWO

The Word Shuffle

You cannot empty your mind — and trying just gives the loop a louder stage. But you can give your mind a different, harmless job. This technique works because it occupies the exact mental channel the loop runs on.

Tonight, you might try:

Pick any ordinary word. Say “blanket.”

Take the first letter — B — and picture something that starts with it.

Bread. Just see it for a moment.

Then another B word. Balloon. Then another. Beach.

When B runs dry, move to L. Lake. Lemon. Ladder. Keep wandering, letter by letter.

The images should be random and unconnected — that’s the point. Scattered, meaningless pictures are exactly what your brain naturally produces as it drifts into sleep. You’re not blocking the loop; you’re crowding it out with something that can’t hurt you.

Notice that this asks nothing of you. No insight, no answers, no fixing.

Just bread, and balloons, and a beach somewhere. Your thoughts are allowed to be this soft.

THREE

Name the Rerun

The 2am loop feels urgent. It feels like if you just think it through one more time, you'll solve it. But look closely and you'll see: it's the same episode, replaying. No new information ever arrives at 2am.

Tonight, you might try:

When you catch the loop running, name it — in a whisper, or just in your head:

"This is the 2am loop. It has no new information."

You're not arguing with the thoughts. You're just recognising the rerun.

Something shifts when a thought is seen rather than believed. The loop loses its disguise as an emergency and becomes what it actually is — a tired brain doing the only trick it knows. You don't have to resolve anything. Recognising it is enough.

You have already survived every single night this loop has ever shown you.

It has never once told you something at 2am that morning—you couldn't handle better in daylight.

FIVE

Borrowed Boredom

Maybe you already fall asleep to a podcast and feel a little ashamed of it — like you should be able to fall asleep “on your own.” Let’s put that down right now. A quiet voice in the dark is one of the oldest ways humans have ever felt safe enough to sleep.

Tonight, you might try:

One earbud. Volume low. Something genuinely boring — a dull documentary, a sleep story, a podcast about anything you don’t care about. If silence feels safer, count backwards from 300 by 3s instead. 300, 297, 294...

Lose your place? Good. That’s the technique working, not failing. Start anywhere.

Both versions do the same thing: they fill the channel the loop needs, with something too dull to keep you awake. Boredom, it turns out, is on your side.

Needing a little help to fall asleep is not a flaw to fix.

After years of falling asleep on alert, borrowed comfort is not cheating. It is wisdom.

AND ONE FOR EARLIER

The 10pm Rule

This one happens before you even get to bed. It's a single sentence, spoken out loud — the same words, every night:

“Nothing gets solved after 10pm. Tomorrow-me will handle it.”

It sounds too simple to work. But said nightly, in the same words, it becomes a handover — a signal to your brain that the day's shift has officially ended. You're not abandoning the problems. You're assigning them to someone better equipped: you, in the morning, with daylight and coffee and a rested mind.

A last word, just for you

None of these will work perfectly every night. Some nights the loop will win anyway, and you'll be tired tomorrow, and you'll still get the kids to school and do the day. That's not failure either. That's you — still here, still showing up.

The loop quietens, over time, as your nervous system learns what your mind already knows: it's over. You got out. You're safe now. These five small practices are how you tell it — gently, nightly, in a language the body understands.

You are not behind. You are not broken. You are a woman whose mind learned to protect her, learning — slowly, kindly — that she can rest now.

I was you. I found my way through. Now I come back for you.

If this guide felt like someone finally understood your zam — there's more where it came from.

Find me on Instagram [@SAFESingleMum](#), or visit safesinglemum.com.au — starting with my free e-book, *You Are Still Here*.