Halloween is almost here. We all have different thoughts and memories related to this holiday. Some of us think of costumes, Trick or Treat, and/or a marathon of scary horror movies. Horror movies can plant the seeds for nightmares. Nightmares creep into your mind while sleeping and can interrupt your sleep by listening for the things that might go bump in the night.

When you have hidden fears and worries, they can emerge in your dreams creating your own theater of the night. It’s as if you find yourself in a darkened movie theater without buying a ticket. You might awaken suddenly in a cold sweat, breathing heavily with your heart racing. Waking up from a nightmare can be disorienting leaving you feeling sick, alone, sad, and afraid. Because these fears emerge in the way they do, they can be sometimes difficult to control.

Can be doesn’t mean cannot be. First, focus on your breathing. Slow your breathing down by taking a deep breath from your diaphragm. Count to four each time you exhale. Make sure you breathe slowly to avoid hyperventilating. Remind yourself that this was a dream and nothing more. Imagine that you are in a safe place and nothing has happened.

Distract yourself by sitting on the side of the bed and naming 5 things you can see in the room. Next name 4 things you can feel such as the bed, your feet on the floor, etc. Then name 3 things you can hear…. traffic outside or a TV in the background. Name 2 things you can smell or 2 things you like to smell. Finally, name 1 good thing about yourself.

Don’t dwell on the nightmare. If you feel the need to examine it, wait until morning. Remind yourself that it was a dream. Look for possible causes for the nightmare. Have you been under extreme stress? Have you witnessed or experienced a traumatic event? Have you stopped or started a medication? Have you been abusing drugs or alcohol?

Keep in mind that you aren’t alone. Nightmares are common, affecting 80 – 90 percent of people at some point in their lives. Counseling or finding a trusted friend to talk with can help overcome nightmares, especially if you have experienced a traumatic event. Remind yourself that the sounds you hear may simply be normal sounds you hear in your house every day. Even though it may seem childish, a small nightlight in a corner of the room may help.

I am reminded of a Scottish prayer a friend used to quote.

From ghoulies and ghosties.
And long leggedy beasties.
And things that go bump in the night.
Good Lord, deliver us!