

# INSOMNIA? HOW TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

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It is not unusual to have trouble sleeping from time to time. It happens to most people occasionally. But, if you feel that you do not get enough sleep or satisfying sleep on a regular basis, you may have insomnia, a sleep disorder.

People with insomnia have one or more of the following:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking up often during the night and having trouble going back to sleep
- Waking up too early in the morning
- Unrefreshing sleep

Insomnia can cause problems during the day, such as sleepiness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating and irritability. A person with insomnia may also have another sleep disorder such as sleep apnea, narcolepsy or restless legs syndrome.

Insomnia is not defined by the number of hours you sleep every night. The amount of sleep a person needs varies. While most people need between 7 and 8 hours of sleep a night, some people do well with less, and some need more.

About 60 million Americans each year suffer from insomnia, which can lead to serious sleep deficits and problems. Insomnia tends to increase with age and affects about 40% of women and 30% of men.

An evaluation for insomnia may include a physical exam, a medical history and a sleep history. You may be asked to keep a sleep diary for a week or two, keeping track of your sleep patterns and how you feel during the day. Your health care provider may want to interview your bed partner about the quantity and quality of your sleep. In some cases, you may be referred to a sleep center for special tests.

Acute, or short-term insomnia may not require treatment. If your insomnia makes it hard to function during the day because you are sleepy and tired, your health care provider may prescribe sleeping pills for a limited time. The rapid onset, short-acting medications now available avoid many of the earlier problems with continuing effects (like feeling drowsy or groggy) the following day. Some medications may be less effective after several weeks of nightly use, and long-term safety and effectiveness has not yet been established. Side effects of sleeping pills and over-the-counter sleep medicines can be a problem, too. Mild insomnia often can be prevented or cured by practicing good sleep habits (see below).

Treatment for chronic (long-term) insomnia includes first treating any underlying conditions or health problems that are causing the insomnia. If insomnia continues, your health care provider may suggest behavioral therapy or medication. Most medicines that are used for sleep have side effects and must be used with caution. It is not recommended to use over-the-counter sleeping pills for insomnia. Behavioral approaches to treatment focus on changing

behaviors that may worsen insomnia and learning new behaviors to promote sleep. Techniques such as relaxation exercises, sleep restriction therapy and reconditioning may be useful. Good sleep habits can help you get a good night's sleep.

- Try to go to sleep at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Try not to take naps during the day because naps may make you less sleepy at night.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol late in the day. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and can keep you from falling asleep. Alcohol can cause waking in the night and interferes with sleep quality.
- Get regular exercise. Try not to exercise close to bedtime because it may stimulate you and make it hard to fall asleep. Experts suggest not exercising for 3 hours before the time you go to sleep.
- Don't eat a heavy meal late in the day. A light snack before bedtime, however, may help you to sleep.
- Make your sleeping place comfortable. Be sure that it is dark, quiet and not too warm or cold. If light is a problem, try sleeping with a sleeping mask. If noise is a problem try earplugs, a fan or a "white noise" machine to cover up the sounds.
- Follow a routine to help relax and wind down before sleep, such as reading a book, listening to music or taking a bath.
- Avoid using your bed for anything other than sleep or sex.
- If you can't fall asleep and don't feel drowsy, get up and read or do something that is not overly stimulating until you feel sleepy.
- If you have trouble lying awake worrying about things, try making a to-do list before you go to bed. This may help you to "let go" of those worries overnight.

September 2006