

## Insomnia

Insomnia can be a major problem causing fatigue, attention difficulties, memory loss, and depression. There are many causes of insomnia ranging from physical abnormalities (such as narcolepsy, sleep apnea, or bladder dysfunction) to psychological problems (such as stress or anxiety). Psychological causes are more common than physical in causing insomnia. Inability to return to sleep after waking in the night is often a sign of anxiety disorder.

Lifestyle factors can play a big role in our inability to fall asleep. Shift work is a good example of something that makes sleep difficult. Irregular bed times can also affect our sleep as can sleeping in or prolonged naps. Many prescription or over the counter meds will keep us from sleeping at night.

If you are having sleep problems try the following things:

1. **REGULAR BED TIMES.** Our bodies have regular circadian rhythms and like to stay on them. If we stay up late one or two nights a week it can throw us off and make the next several nights of sleep difficult. It is better to get to bed at midnight every night than to get to bed at 10:00 five nights a week but stay up to 2 am twice a week.
2. **SET THE ALLARM.** It is vital that we get up at the same approximate time every day if insomnia is a problem in our lives. Even if we do not get to sleep until two or three in the am, sleeping in will only make insomnia the next night worse.
3. **AVOID NAPS.** Like sleeping in, irregular naps can make falling asleep at night difficult. If you have time for a short nap 30-60 minutes and can take that nap every day and you don't have a hard time falling asleep, then a nap is ok.
4. **BEDS SHOULD ONLY BE USED FOR SLEEP AND SEX.** Lying in bed doing other things trick our brain into thinking that beds are for staying awake in. Try and avoid reading in bed and especially avoid the brain stimulating affects of watching TV in bed. In fact, if you have insomnia you should do what you can to get TV s and computers out of the bedroom.
5. **NO CAFFEINE.** For some people caffeine can stay in the system for 12-15 hours and a morning drink can keep you awake at night. For most people this is not true but if you cannot sleep stop caffeine altogether until you find falling asleep easier. Then if you feel that you need a morning pick-me-up start it again and see if you can continue sleeping. If you suffer from insomnia you should never have caffeine after 2 pm.
6. **AVOID DECONGESTANTS.** Decongestants have stimulating affects similar to caffeine and should be avoided in insomniacs.
7. **EXERCISE EARLY IN THE DAY.** Regular exercise can make a person tired and ready for sleep and help to maintain a good circadian rhythm in your body. Exercise done after 7 pm can keep you awake so try and exercise early in the day.
8. **DO NOT STAY IN BED IF YOU CAN'T SLEEP.** If you have been in bed for over 20 minutes and are not asleep you need to get out and do something else that is not stimulating. Read a text book, the newspaper, or the scriptures. Avoid TV

or the internet at this time as these activities can wake you up more than you are. Do not eat. Night time eating is a sure way to put on extra pounds. When you get tired get back in bed. Once again, if sleep has not come in 20 minutes get up and do something else. If you stay in bed and try and make yourself fall asleep you will end up training your brain not to sleep in bed.

9. **DO NOT EAT RIGHT BEFORE BED.** Small amounts of some foods can make a person sleepy such as a glass of warm milk or a small turkey sandwich. For most people however, food right before bed causes acid reflux. In some people this acid reflux has no symptoms. Even such asymptomatic acid reflux can keep a person awake. Try to make your last food intake 2-3 hours before bed.
10. **GET THE TV OUT OF THE BEDROOM.** TVs have been discussed above. TVs are very stimulating and are responsible for a lot of the insomnia enjoyed by Americans. If your insomnia is bad you may want to get rid of your TV s altogether from your home.
11. **GET A CHECKUP.** If you have tried these suggestions and are not improving or if you are worried about some sort of a physical cause of insomnia come in for a checkup. We can get you checked for such sleep disturbing things as diabetes, sleep apnea, narcolepsy, prostate enlargement, etc. We can also help you decide if sleep medication may be useful for you.

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