



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT INSOMNIA

Do you sleep soundly every night?

Almost everyone has occasional sleepless nights, perhaps due to stress, heartburn, or drinking too much caffeine or alcohol. Insomnia is a lack of sleep that occurs on a regular or frequent basis, often for no apparent reason. Each person requires a different amount of sleep; however, 7 1/2 hours of sleep per night is about average.

Inability to get a good night's sleep can affect not only your energy level and mood, but your health as well, because sleep helps bolster your immune system. Fatigue, at any age, leads to diminished mental alertness and concentration.

Lack of sleep is linked to accidents both on the road and on the job. Sleeplessness may be temporary or chronic. You don't necessarily have to live with sleepless nights. Some simple changes in your daily routine and habits may result in better sleep.

Types of Insomnia

Transient Insomnia is the inability to sleep well for several nights.

Short-term Insomnia is the inability to sleep well for two or three weeks.

Chronic Insomnia is the inability to sleep well every or most nights. While many people attribute chronic insomnia to stress, it is important to determine the real underlying cause. Often times, insomnia exacerbates the underlying condition by leaving the patient fatigued and less able to cope and think clearly. In approximately half of all cases, insomnia is a symptom of depression or anxiety. In other cases insomnia is a result of physical ailments, such as arthritis, breathing disorders, periodic limb movements, restless leg syndrome and pain during sleep.

Statistics

- Insomnia plagues 48% of American adults.
- The *Sleep In America Poll* by the National Sleep Foundation, finds a direct correlation between the number of diagnosed medical conditions in America's older adults, and the quality of their sleep.
- More than 40 million Americans complain of chronic insomnia.
- 80% of those with four or more medical conditions report a sleep problem compared to 53% of those without conditions.

Causes

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| * Obstructive sleep apnea | * Pain | * Caffeine |
| * Alcohol | * Periodic leg movements | * Diabetes |
| * Prescription and nonprescription drugs | * Lung Disease | * Abnormal circadian rhythm |
| * Restless leg syndrome | * Misuse or overuse of sleeping pills | * Depression |
| * Heart Disease | * Stress/Anxiety | * Nicotine |
| | | * Poor sleep habits |

Screening and Diagnosis

Insomnia may be difficult to diagnose because of its partly subjective nature and because so many factors can affect your sleep.

Your doctor may ask you questions about your sleep patterns, such as how long you've experienced your symptoms and whether they occur every night. Your doctor may also ask about whether you snore, how well you function during the day, whether you take any medications and whether you have other health disorders. You may be asked to complete a questionnaire to determine your wake-sleep pattern and your level of daytime sleepiness.

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Treatment

If your sleep has been disturbed for more than a month and this disruption is interfering with your daytime functioning, you should seek help from a doctor. Insomnia is a symptom; it is not a diagnosis. The causes of insomnia vary greatly. Proper evaluation and treatment should include a review of sleep patterns and any medications being taken, as well as a medical history and physical exam. In some cases, a sleep study will be necessary. Following good sleep hygiene may help eliminate your symptoms.

Sleep Hygiene

- If you cannot fall asleep, or awaken for more than 15 to 20 minutes during the night, get up and do something relaxing in another room. The bedroom should be associated only with sleep or sex.
- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at a similar time each morning. This strengthens the biological rhythm that controls the sleep-wake cycle. If bed times vary significantly on work-nights versus nights off, then the body's rhythms are disrupted, much like jet lag. People need an average of eight hours of sleep per night.
- Do not use the quiet time once the lights are off to rehash the day or plan the next day's activities. Develop a **worry time** for these thoughts prior to bedtime.
- The bedroom should be dark (never try to fall asleep with the lights or TV on), and quiet. Draperies, including blackout curtains will help darken the room. Drapes and carpets also serve as sound absorbers.
- Cool rooms are better for sleeping than warm rooms.
- A light snack before bedtime may help you sleep, but avoid heavy meals late in the evening.
- Avoid alcohol in the late evening, this aggravates snoring, obstructive sleep apnea, and causes disturbed sleep during the latter part of the night. No one feels refreshed after drinking too much the night before.
- Avoid using sleeping pills for more than one or two nights per month. Avoid them totally if you have obstructive sleep apnea.
- Eliminate all caffeine after lunch time.
- Do not nap for more than 30 minutes during the day. Longer naps disrupt the body's ability to stay asleep at night.
- Regular exercise helps promote deep sleep, but avoid heavy exercise in the evenings, or it may be harder to fall asleep. Avoid vigorous exercise after 7 p.m.