

Insomnia



2 Behavioural techniques

Relaxation therapy, sleep restriction therapy, reconditioning and cognitive behavioural therapy are just some psychological and behavioural interventions which have been shown to be helpful. A psychologist can teach and guide you on these techniques.



3 Medications

Long term use of some sleep medications can cause them to lose their effect and result in other side effects. Speak to your doctor about the appropriate use of medications if your insomnia persists despite lifestyle changes and behavioural interventions.



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Information is correct at time of printing (March 2019).



What is Insomnia?

Insomnia is the most common of all sleep disorders. Approximately 30 - 50% of the population suffer from insomnia, and 2 in 10 adults have persistent insomnia at some point in their lifetimes. Although the amount of sleep we need varies from person to person, most people require an average of 7 - 9 hours of good quality sleep to function optimally in the day.



Symptoms of Insomnia

Signs and symptoms of insomnia include:

- Difficulty falling asleep at night
- Frequent interruptions to sleep
- Difficulty falling back to sleep after early morning awakenings
- Daytime fatigue and sleepiness
- Not feeling refreshed after a night's sleep

A person suffering from insomnia may experience poor concentration, poor memory, slower reaction times, irritability, anxiety and mood changes in the day. This can affect work performance and negatively impact one's relationships and quality of life.

Types of Insomnia



- 1 Primary insomnia is not directly associated with any other health condition.



- 2 Secondary insomnia is caused by another medical condition such as asthma, heartburn, pain, breathlessness, bladder problems, anxiety or depression.

Insomnias can also be classified by their duration:

- Transient insomnia lasts a few nights
- Short-term insomnia lasts 2 - 4 weeks
- Chronic insomnia lasts for more than a month

Causes of Insomnia

- Environmental factors (e.g. noise, temperature changes and excessive light).
- Changes in the sleep-wake cycle (e.g. jet lag and shift work).
- Lifestyle factors (e.g. poor sleep hygiene, excessive daytime napping, excessive caffeine intake, alcohol consumption or smoking before bedtime).
- Medical conditions which result in breathlessness, pain, restlessness and frequent urination at night.
- Psychological conditions (e.g. depression, anxiety or stress).

Insomnia and aging

Insomnia becomes more common as we age. There are changes to our sleep patterns, activity levels and hormone levels which cause us to feel sleepy earlier and wake up earlier. The elderly often experience more fragmented sleep and have to spend more time in bed to achieve an adequate duration of sleep. These changes do not indicate a sleep problem unless they cause problems with daytime functioning.

Treatment of Insomnia

Transient and short-term insomnia usually do not require treatment. Treatment of chronic insomnia involves treating the underlying medical or psychological conditions, as well as reducing or stopping the behaviours which are contributing to insomnia. Short-term use of sleeping pills may be appropriate.

1 Lifestyle changes

A simple bedtime routine such as having a light snack or taking a hot bath can help our minds prepare for sleep. Exercising in the day and avoiding excessive naps will also help. You should stay away from stimulants such as caffeine (coffee, some sodas and teas) and chocolates in the evening.

