



# 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 healthy sleep difficult. Irregular bedtimes can also affect our sleep as can sleeping in or taking prolonged naps. Many prescriptions or over the counter medications or products can keep us from sleeping at night also.

## IF YOU HAVE SLEEP PROBLEMS TRY THE FOLLOWING THINGS:

**1. REGULAR BEDTIMES.** 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 go to bed at midnight every night than to go to bed at 10:00 PM five nights a week, but stay up until 2:00 AM twice a week.

**2. SET THE ALARM.** 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 2:00 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 at the same time and you don't have trouble falling asleep, then a nap is ok. Otherwise, avoid them.

**4. BEDS SHOULD ONLY BE USED FOR SLEEPING AND SEX.** Lying in bed doing other activities trains our brain into thinking that beds are for staying awake in. Avoid other activities in bed including reading, TV watching, and computer or electronic use. In fact, keep them out of your bedroom all together.

**5. BE MINDFUL OF SUBSTANCE INTAKE.** For some people caffeine can stay in the system for 12-15 hours and a morning

drink can keep you awake at night. If you cannot sleep avoid caffeine altogether until falling asleep is not a problem. Then, if you need a morning pick-me-up start it again and see if you can maintain good sleep. If you suffer from insomnia you should never intake caffeine within 8 hours of bedtime, tobacco within 3 hours, and no alcohol at bedtime.

**6. AVOID DECONGESTANTS.** These medications have stimulating effects 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. It also helps to maintain a good circadian rhythm in your body. Exercise after 7:00 PM can keep some people awake.

**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 book, the newspaper, or something boring. Do not eat, watch TV or surf the Net. When you feel tired, get back in bed. Repeat the pattern if needed.

**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 limit your food intake for 2-3 hours before bed.

1. Regular Bed Time
2. Set the Alarm
3. Avoid Naps
4. Beds are for Sleeping
5. Cut the Caffeine
6. Avoid Decongestants
7. Exercise Early
8. Get Out of Bed
9. Don't Eat Before Sleep
10. Get a Checkup

**10. GET A CHECKUP.** If you have tried these suggestions and are not improving or if you are worried about some sort of physical or psychological cause of insomnia, come in for a checkup. We can check you for sleep disturbing illnesses like diabetes, sleep apnea, narcolepsy, prostate enlargement, anxiety, etc. We can also help you decide if medication or treatments may be useful for you.

## GET THE ELECTRONICS OUT OF THE BEDROOM!

TV and other electronics are very stimulating to the brain and are responsible for a lot of insomnia in Americans. If you have insomnia you should want to keep electronics out of the bedroom, and if your insomnia is severe, you may want to get rid of television watching altogether from your home!