

# INSOMNIA



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Problems falling asleep, staying asleep, waking early, or a combination of these. Insomnia affects all age groups, but is more common in the elderly. Insomnia is often described by how long it has gone on. Transient is a few days, short-term is less than 3 weeks, and chronic is more than 3 weeks.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Difficulty falling asleep.
- A brief period of sleep is followed by wakefulness.
- Normal sleep until very early in the morning, then wakefulness (often with frightening thoughts).
- Daytime fatigue and tiredness.
- Lack of sleep causes problems with social, work, family, and other areas of one's life.

### CAUSES

Insomnia is a symptom, not a disease. It can be caused by physical, mental, and environmental problems.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Depression, anxiety, tension, or stress.
- Daytime napping.
- Noise (including a snoring partner).
- Allergies and early-morning wheezing.
- Heart or lung problems that cause shortness of breath when lying down.
- Painful disorders, such as arthritis.
- Frequent need to urinate at night.
- Night sweats, or disorders that cause excess itching.
- Sexual problems.
- Drinking caffeine drinks such as coffee, tea, or cola.
- Use of some drugs.
- Odd work hours, such as swing shifts.
- A new environment or location.
- Jet lag after travel.
- Lack of exercise.
- Smoking, alcoholism, or drug abuse, including overuse of sleep-inducing drugs.
- Withdrawal from addictive substances.
- Sleep apnea.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid lengthy daytime napping.
- Avoid risk factors, where possible.
- For general good health, eat a healthy diet, exercise daily, maintain weight for height, and don't smoke.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Insomnia can usually be relieved by treating the cause, using self-care steps, or with other medical treatment.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Insomnia can cause impaired thinking, and health and emotional problems that affect all aspects of life.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- You may use self-care steps first. These include:
  - Try to reduce tension, stress, or anxiety in your life.
  - Don't turn your bedroom into an office or a den.
  - Create a comfortable sleep setting.
  - Relax in a warm bath before bedtime.
  - After 15 to 20 minutes of trying to sleep, get up and do some relaxing activity. Don't watch television.
  - Turn off your mind. Focus on peaceful and relaxing thoughts. Play soft music or relaxation tapes.
  - Set a strict sleep schedule and keep to it.
  - Use ear plugs, eye shades, or an electric blanket.
- See your health care provider if self-care doesn't help. A physical exam may be done and questions asked about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may be done to check for any physical disorders. A sleep study may be prescribed. Medical steps may include:
  - Counseling for problems such as depression.
  - Treatment for any medical order diagnosed.

### MEDICATIONS

- Sleep-inducing drugs may be prescribed for a short time if: short-term insomnia is interfering with daily activities; you have a disorder that disturbs sleep; you need to establish regular sleep patterns.
- Long-term use of sleep inducers may be counter-productive or addictive. Don't use sleeping pills unless they are prescribed.

### ACTIVITY

- Exercise daily to create healthy fatigue, but not within 2 hours of going to bed.
- Have sexual relations, if they are satisfying and fulfilling before going to sleep.

### DIET

Avoid alcohol, caffeine, or a heavy meal within 3 hours of bedtime. Try a light snack with milk at bedtime.



### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has had insomnia for over 4 weeks or it is interfering with your ability to function.
- Drugs used in treatment produce any side effects.

Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page