

Insomnia- The Common Sleep Problem

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Most of us at some time in our life had experienced or will experience temporary problems with the inability to have a restful and satisfied night's sleep. Almost half of a group of population suffers from long term difficulty falling asleep and/or staying asleep, i.e *chronic* insomnia. Chronic insomnia is a common sleep disorder and more common among elderly. *Transient* insomnia experienced at times of stress or as 'jet lag'. Short term insomnia is associated with relationship difficulties or death of a loved one, occupational stress and some physical illnesses. In Clinical Practice, it is mostly secondary to Psychiatric disorders e.g., Depressive or anxiety disorders and physical painful conditions. Excessive use of caffeine, alcohol and stimulants (e.g, amphetamine) also provoke it. In about 15% cases no cause can be found.

For most people, insomnia lasts for few days only and goes *without treatment*. But insomnia due to physical and psychiatric disorder lasts for several weeks and may not go away on its own. One can easily assess his/her sleep disturbance by asking himself/herself whether he/she has trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, whether wake up too early or feels un-refreshed after sleeping? Does this occur even though he/she has the opportunity or time to get a good night's sleep? Does he/she has one of the followings: low energy, lack of motivation/attention/concentration, memory problems,

poor performance at school or work, extreme mood change, day time sleepiness, errors at work, headache or tension/worry about sleep.

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practice and habits that are necessary to have good night time sleep quality and full day time alertness. To improve sleep one must obey the followings: a) Maintaining an active and healthy life style including exercise and nutrition. b) Getting up at the same time every morning. c) Exercising regularly. d) Going to bed at the same time every night. e) Avoiding smoking. f) Improving sleeping environment- dark, cool room (68°F) comfortable bed. g) Turning off electronic devices 30 minutes before bed time. h) Avoiding taking a large meal 3 hours of bed time. i) Avoiding going to bed hungry, j) Avoiding intake of caffeine containing drinks after sunset e.g. tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks etc. k) Avoiding rigorous exercise within 3 hours of bed time. l) Taking a short nap in the day time. m) To avoid Over the Counter (OTC) sleep medications without physician's advice. n) Not to worry about problems in bed (scheduling an early worry time). k) To begin pre-sleep rituals that help to relax before bed e.g., listening light music, reading news paper etc. l) Not to go to bed unless sleepy. m) If not asleep within 20 minutes, need to get out of bed and do something relaxing. Obtaining healthy sleep is important for both physical and mental health and can also improve productivity and overall quality of life.