

Insomnia and polio patients

Information for patients

What is insomnia?

Insomnia can take many forms:

- You may find it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep during the night.
- You may wake up too early.
- When you wake up in the morning you don't feel refreshed.
- Poor sleep makes it harder for you to function during the day.

Insomnia is not defined by the number of hours you sleep, because each person needs a different amount of sleep.

In some people, insomnia may be linked to other medical conditions, such as sleep apnoea, depression, stress, and pain. In these cases, treatment of the underlying problem may improve sleep.

Symptoms of insomnia

Common symptoms of insomnia include:

- difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- variable sleep, such as several nights of poor sleep followed by one night of better sleep
- daytime fatigue or sleepiness
- forgetfulness
- poor concentration
- irritability
- anxiety
- depression
- reduced motivation or energy
- increased errors or accidents
- ongoing worry about sleep.

How insomnia can make you feel

For many people, insomnia affects their relationships, job performance, and daily function. In one survey, people who had chronic insomnia were twice as likely to have a car accident compared to people who were tired for other reasons.

People with insomnia have an impaired sense of sleep. You may feel that you have not slept, even if testing shows that you have. You may also feel more tired and worn out than people who don't have insomnia, even if testing shows that you are less sleepy. This impaired sense of sleep may be related to a problem with the body's sleep-arousal system, which normally helps you feel awake after sleeping and feel tired before going to bed.

One result of poor sleep is that you may worry that you will be sleep-deprived and will suffer from serious consequences of lost sleep. This concern may grow as you are unable to sleep, which in turn makes it increasingly difficult to fall asleep. It is important that you not get caught in this cycle and understand that you are sleeping more than it seems.

What can I do to improve my insomnia?

Here are some key principles:

1. Sleep only long enough to feel rested and then get out of bed.
2. Go to bed and get up at the same time each day.
3. Avoid forcing sleep.
4. Exercise regularly (low-impact, interval training) but not 4 to 5 hours before you go to bed.

5. Avoid caffeinated beverages after lunch.
6. Avoid alcohol in the late afternoon, evening and near bedtime; that means no 'night cap'.
7. Avoid smoking, especially at night.
8. Adjust your bedroom environment. Make sure it's dark, quiet, and a comfortable temperature. Remove reminders of work or other things that make you feel stressed.
9. Deal with your worries before you go to bed. If it helps you, make a list of things to work on the next day so can reduce your anxiety at night.

You can try relaxation therapy, or talk to a counsellor or psychologist about problems that might be causing poor sleep.

Should I see a doctor?

Yes, if you have insomnia and it is troubling you, please see your general practitioner (GP). If someone else notices that you snore or stop breathing when you sleep, please see your GP because you may need a sleep study.

Are there medicines to help me sleep?

Yes, there are medicines to help with sleep. You should only try them after you have tried the techniques described above.

You should not use sleeping medications every night for long periods of time. Continuous treatment is usually limited to less than 2 weeks. The medications used are:

- hypnotic drugs, such as benzodiazepine, zolpidem or zopiclone
- melatonin.

Hypnotic medications can make you still sleepy in the morning, which can affect driving safety, job performance and decision-making. There are side effects from benzodiazepine use, such as falls, impaired thinking, dependence on the drug, and incontinence.

Melatonin is a hormone produced by the body, and it helps to regulate sleep. It is available as a prolonged-release tablet. It can be used for up to 3 weeks to help re-establish sleep regulation.

If you are experiencing mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety, it can affect your sleep. Please see your GP for advice, because you may benefit from a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which will help you access support from a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. Also, your GP or psychiatrist may prescribe medication to manage any mental health concerns.

Can I use alcohol to help me sleep?

No. Do not use alcohol as a sleep aid. Even though alcohol makes you feel sleepy at first, it will disrupt your sleep later in the night.

References

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