

# Chronic Insomnia: What You Can Do to Sleep Better

## What is insomnia?

Insomnia is when you have a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep, even if you have the chance to get good sleep. Waking up early in the morning and not being able to get back to sleep is also common with insomnia. You may not function well the next day because of a lack of sleep. Insomnia can affect your energy, mood, health, work performance, and quality of life.

## What are common symptoms?

Trouble falling or staying asleep is usually the main problem. You may have several nights of poor sleep followed by a night of better sleep. Other common symptoms include:

- Anxiety/worry
- Daytime tiredness
- Depression
- Difficulty paying attention
- Feeling unrested
- Forgetfulness
- Headaches
- Increased errors or accidents
- Irritability
- Ongoing worries about sleep
- Poor concentration
- Reduced motivation or energy
- Stomach problems, mainly from worrying

## Can insomnia be serious?

Yes. Your body needs enough rest to work properly. It is important that you talk to your doctor if you are having trouble sleeping.

## What can I do to sleep better?

Improving your sleep habits is a good start. Your doctor can treat any medical or psychiatric conditions that might be making your insomnia worse. Your doctor can also recommend therapy to help you learn ways to sleep better, like how to relax and not worry about sleep. Medicine might help, but you shouldn't use sleeping pills long term. Your doctor can help decide what treatment is right for you.

Some people need more sleep than others. Sleep usually occurs in two- to three-hour cycles, so it is important to get at least three uninterrupted hours of sleep.

The following tips can help you develop better sleep habits:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day
- Lie down to sleep only when sleepy
- If you can't sleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and go to another room; return to the bedroom when you are tired; repeat as necessary
- Use bedroom for sleep and sex only



# Chronic Insomnia: What You Can Do to Sleep Better *(continued)*

- Don't do things in bed that might keep you awake, like watching television, reading, talking on the phone, or worrying
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, or alcohol for at least four to six hours before bedtime
- Avoid strenuous exercise within four hours of bedtime
- Avoid daytime napping
- Relax before going to bed
- Avoid eating large meals or drinking a lot of water or other liquids in the evening
- Keep the bedroom a comfortable temperature
- Use earplugs if noise is a problem
- Expose yourself to daytime light for at least 30 minutes each morning

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/insomnia.html>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/insom>

National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/insomnia.html>

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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