



DEALING WITH INSOMNIA

Insomnia is a persistent difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep. It is a symptom, not a cause, of some condition that interferes with one's sleep. Insomnia can result from an interaction of biological, physical, psychological, and environmental factors. More than 70 million Americans habitually cannot achieve continuous sleep at night.

Three Types of Insomnia

- Transient insomnia involves occasional episodes of restless nights due to environmental changes (jet lag, nearby noisy activities) or exciting or anxiety producing experiences (a fight with the boss, a new romance).
- Short-term insomnia, lasting a few weeks, generally arises from temporary stressful experiences (the death of a loved one, the fear of losing a job, new pressures). Some people have trouble adjusting their sleeping and waking schedules to meet new needs (a change in working hours).
- Chronic insomnia may last an extended time, months or years. Identifying the causes of these more serious sleep problems may require an evaluation by your physician or a specialist.

Causes of Chronic Insomnia

- Poor sleep habits, which interrupt or decrease the ability to sleep, keep individuals from obtaining the amount of sleep they need to function.
- Psychological problems can also cause chronic insomnia. Having highly ambitious desires or demanding peak performance daily can cause persistent anxiety, which can keep people awake. Many try too hard to sleep. Others may experience severe depression, which can profoundly affect sleep and sleep cycle.
- Extended use of medication (tranquilizers, stimulants, steroids, and many other medications) can restrict one's deep restful sleep.
- Excessive use of alcohol may act as a sedative for two to three hours and then cause disturbed sleep in the latter half of the night.
- Disruptive sleeping and waking schedules (i.e., irregular bedtime and waking time) confuse the body's biological clock. Some insomniacs take naps to combat excessive daytime sleepiness, but this only further confuses the body's clock for sleep.
- The natural process of aging and additional health problems diminish deep restful sleep and the amount of nighttime sleep to an average of six hours for the elderly.

Identifying the causes of insomnia may require a visit to your family physician or a sleep specialist, who will take your medical history and review your symptoms. They may ask you to keep a log of your daily activities and your sleep habits in order to provide clues for appropriate treatment. The need for quality sleep should be taken seriously; lack of sleep can lead to other physical and emotional problems.

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