

Insomnia

Everyone experiences some problems sleeping from time to time. Maybe you are under stress at work or you are worried about a problem your child is having at school. Tossing and turning for a few extra minutes is no big deal; however, if you are having a real problem getting to sleep and then maintaining sleep, you may be suffering from insomnia.

People sometimes have a picture in their minds of insomniacs as people who never sleep; however, you don't have to be awake all day and night to have insomnia. Insomnia is defined as difficulty initiating sleep, maintaining sleep, or waking up not feeling rested. When someone is experiencing these symptoms, and the symptoms are NOT the result of another physical illness, the person is said to have primary insomnia.

Often when people are experiencing symptoms of insomnia, it is due to a disruption in their biological clock, specifically related to temperature. The body's temperature fluctuates during the day and when we sleep, the body's temperature cools to its lowest points. If the body's temperatures do not vary enough, it can interfere with sleep a great deal.

It is very common that people's thoughts about how much sleep they need in a day can affect their sleep patterns negatively. For example, if someone thinks he/she need 8 hours of sleep but is aware that he/she will only get 6 hours tonight, tomorrow the person is likely to feel more tired than if he/she did not put a lot of emphasis on the amount of sleep he/she was getting.

There are many remedies to assist people with their sleep. We have all seen the commercials for sleep aids, both prescription and over-the-counter. However, here are some other things to try:

- Don't nap during the day.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine as much as possible before bed. Although alcohol can help initiate sleep, there is evidence that it can interfere with sleep.
- Stop smoking. Nicotine, the addictive additive in cigarettes, is a stimulant and can keep you awake longer.
- Make your bed large and comfortable with quality bedding.
- Make your bedroom a quiet and peaceful place. TVs and radios, though very common in bedrooms now, can create a lot of distraction and provide stimulation that will make it difficult to sleep.
- If you are having a lot of trouble sleeping, get out of bed and do something. Then go back to bed in a few minutes, take a few deep breathes to relax and attempt to sleep again. The more your body and mind associate your bed with tasks other than sleep, the harder it will be to fall asleep in your bed.
- Put yourself on a regular sleep schedule. Humans, like all animals, are reliant on consistency. If you get into a routine that puts you to bed at the same time and has you getting up at the same time everyday, it may be easier to fall asleep.

- Don't bring your problems to bed with you. It can be very hard to put aside the stress of everyday life when one tries to sleep, but stress will definitely keep you awake. If you feel like you can't stop thinking about all the things you have to do or the things that are bothering you when you are in bed, keep a pad of paper next to your bed and write them down as they come to you. If they are out of your mind and on the paper, it will be easier to put them behind you for the night.

These tips are intended to help, but insomnia is a serious disorder that can disrupt your life. If you are experiencing repeated episodes of insomnia, and these tips do not work for you, contact your doctor. Insomnia can be brought on by physical disorders that need a physician's attention. Listen to your body; don't ignore what could be a serious problem.