

## ***Treatment of Insomnia***

Insomnia a problem which may date back many years. An overnight solution to a long standing problem is not possible and fixing the problem requires strong motivation and commitment.

The aim of the treatment is to enable the person to “*regain control of their sleep*”. Treatment involves three steps:

1. Suggestions for better sleep.
2. Restriction of time in bed.
3. Use of medications.

### ***Suggestions for better sleep***

See back page.

### ***Restriction of time in bed***

A person with insomnia keeps a sleep diary for about 2 weeks. The information obtained includes the time the person goes to bed, how long they take to fall asleep, how many times they wake after falling asleep and for how long, what time the person wakes and what time they get out of bed.

A program is then prescribed by the doctor so that the patient is allowed to be in bed for a small amount of time in a 24 hour period. This creates a state of light to moderate sleep deprivation which usually helps to improve the sleep pattern.

### ***The use of medication***

Hypnotic medication (medication which helps a person sleep) may help the person regain control over their sleep pattern. Medications can be used while the person is trying to change his sleep pattern. Depending upon the patient, their age and problem, medication can also be used long term. It is also acceptable to use hypnotic medication only when needed.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTER SLEEP**

- \* **Go to bed only when you are sleepy.**
- \* **Don't use your bed for anything except sleep and sexual activity.**
- \* **If you are unable to fall asleep, get up and go into another room. Go back to bed only when you feel sleepy. Although you should not watch the clock, if you are in bed for more than 10 minutes without falling asleep, you should get out of bed.**
- \* **Repeat step 3 as often as necessary during the night.**
- \* **Set your alarm and get up at the same time each day, regardless of how much sleep you got during the night.**
- \* **Do not take naps during the day.**
- \* **Avoid caffeinated beverages (coffee, tea, colas) in the evening.**
- \* **Avoid too much liquid in the evening so you don't have to go to the toilet during the night.**
- \* **Too much tobacco use disturbs sleep.**
- \* **Avoid heavy physical exercise in the evening.**
- \* **Avoid alcohol, especially in the evening, as it can disrupt your sleep.**
- \* **If you look at the clock at night, turn it so you can't see it, or cover it up.**

# ***InsOmNia***



~ difficulty sleeping ~

**Newcastle Sleep Disorders Centre**

**Division of the Respiratory Medicine Unit**

**Hunter Area Health Service**

**Ph: (02) 4923 6833**

**Royal Newcastle  
Hospital**

**Warners Bay  
Private Hospital**

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/departments/md/sleep/>

# Insomnia

*A person complaining of insomnia is unsatisfied with their sleep.*

Insomnia has been reported by up to 36% of the population. However, only 5% have persistent and severe enough insomnia for them to seek medical attention. A person with insomnia may complain of one or more of the following symptoms:

- \* Difficulty going to sleep
- \* Difficulty staying sleep
- \* Early morning awakening

Sleep quality is described as light, restless and unrefreshing. During the day the patient may be tired, fatigued, and have mood swings.

## ***Quantity of sleep***

It is the person's perception of the quality of their sleep which is important in insomnia. Two out of three adults report sleeping between 7-8½ hours per night. However, some people who are "short sleepers" (4-5hours/night) may not complain of insomnia. On the other hand "long sleepers" (9-10hours/night) may still complain of insomnia.

## ***Sleep misperception***

This refers to the feeling of unrefreshing sleep even when a sleep study recording shows good quality sleep. There is no clear explanation for it. It is possible that current sleep recording is unable to detect some abnormalities in sleep. Sleep misperception can result in anxiety and mood disturbance. Usually hypnotic medications (medications which helps you to fall asleep) are not useful.

## ***How long does it usually take to fall asleep?***

The time it takes to fall asleep in healthy adults varies from a few minutes up to 30 minutes.

# ***TYPES OF INSOMNIA***

## ***Long-term (persistent or chronic) Insomnia***

This type of insomnia is seen in sleep disorders centres. It is defined as an insomnia of at least 6 months duration which results in poor sleep quality, daytime fatigue, performance impairment and mood disturbances. There are two main types of long-term insomnia;

### ***Psychophysiological Insomnia***

This is the most common type of insomnia. It is not unusual for the problem to go back 10-20 years.

Sometimes the person remembers a stressful period

when the insomnia started. However, instead of the problem resolving after a few weeks, it continued. The reason why the problem continues and reinforces itself can be explained by two factors. 1) Some people tend to be "light sleepers" to begin with and tend to react to stressful situations with a high level of tension. 2) The insomnia "feeds" on itself. Because sleep quality fails to improve over time, the person becomes more focused on the need to "get a good night's sleep". The harder a person tries to get a good night's sleep, the more anxious they become as bedtime approaches. This makes the problem worse. The person may try to help sleep with relaxation techniques, reading, listening to music or watching TV in bed. All these things can help at first, however, they gradually become less effective. The end result is that the bed and bedroom, instead of being the place where the person rests, becomes an anxiety raising environment. In simple terms the person feels that they have "lost control over their sleep". They may also feel tired, depressed and unable to perform properly during the day.

### ***Idiopathic Insomnia***

Idiopathic insomnia is almost the same as psychophysiological insomnia but it starts in childhood (it is also called "childhood onset insomnia") and tends to run in families. Idiopathic insomnia can also result in social problems due to poor performance during the day, constant tiredness, inability to concentrate and mood swings.

## ***Short-term (transient) Insomnia***

Difficulty falling and staying asleep can occur in association with stressful events. This should be considered a normal reaction of the body in difficult circumstances. An interpersonal problem (marriage breakup), financial crisis, exams or a death in the family are events which raise the level of anxiety and result in difficulty sleeping. This problem usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks. The person is often aware that their difficulty falling asleep is related to stressful events. Often no treatment is needed. However, in some circumstances the use of medication is required for a short time.