

Insomnia: Its Causes & Solutions

Many people may suffer from insomnia at some point in their lives, as it is a fairly common problem, especially as you age. Long-term insomnia can have drastic effects on your health, if the problem is not properly addressed.



If you suffer from long term insomnia chances are it will eventually begin to influence performance at work, as well as dull your thinking abilities considerably. When you are constantly tired and fatigued, simple tasks that usually take little, to no thought at all will become more difficult. Writing out a check correctly, or remembering to pay your monthly bills, is just a couple of examples of how insomnia can dull your thought process.

It is a fact that humans need to sleep in order to survive. Sleeping is as natural for humans as breathing. When you sleep, your body is regenerating, and when you do not get the proper amount of sleep, your body will eventually become worn down, and unable to fight off illness.

It is during sleep that the body creates the hormones that nurture and heal muscle, as well as other body tissues.

When you go through a long period where you are lacking quality sleep, your body will no longer have the ability to be resistant to disease, causing you to become ill more often, and the illnesses you suffer may become more serious.

Few people realize that lack of quality sleep may also cause weight gain. Over a long period of time, someone who suffers from insomnia may develop insulin resistance, which is a condition to where your body is not using insulin, as it should be. This could result in too much insulin in the body, which turns to fat cells and is stored, usually around the stomach.

Another area of your health that lack of quality sleep may influence is your brain. At one time it was commonly believed that the brain went into a doormat stage during sleep, but this is no longer thought to be true. On the contrary, when you are asleep the brain is also regenerating as it continually works out problems, even those that may exist at a subconscious level. In addition, research has shown that when you do not get enough sleep, you may begin having problems retaining memories, as well as processing complex emotions.

Those who suffer from insomnia may experience some, or all of the following problems.

- Fatigue
- Drowsiness
- Lack of concentration
- A decrease of alertness and work performance
- Muscles seem to ache for no reason.
- Depression
- Feeling stressed and irritable

Of course many people have experienced short bouts of temporary insomnia brought on by a particularly stressful event. You can suffer from temporary insomnia if you have had a recent illness, emotional crisis, or are under a lot of stress. Pain, and certain medications can also bring on insomnia. It is when this becomes a long term problem that it will begin to influence your day to day living, as well as your health.

People can suffer from insomnia at any age, from children to the elderly, though it is a much more frequent problem with older people.

How can I tell if I have insomnia?

You may be suffering from insomnia if,

- You are having trouble falling asleep
- You find that you frequently wake up many times during the night, and have difficulty returning to sleep.
- You wake up too early in the morning
- You feel groggy and un-refreshed when you wake in the morning, even if you have slept up to 7 or 8 hours.

People vary in the amount of sleep that they need, but on average a person needs at least 7 hours of sleep each night, but even if you are getting that much sleep, you can also be classified as suffering from insomnia if you are not getting enough quality sleep.

What is insomnia?

Insomnia is a broad term to classify a small number of different types of sleep disorders. There are actually a few different types of insomnia, and they include,

- Short-term insomnia, also known as Transient insomnia; this is a type of insomnia that can last anywhere from a single night, to a few weeks.
- Intermittent insomnia is when someone suffers from insomnia that comes and goes. This is usually a short-term insomnia problem, which may only affect you every once in a while.
- Chronic insomnia is the ongoing inability to get enough sleep, or enough quality sleep. If you suffer from insomnia three or more nights a week, for more than a month, it is considered chronic insomnia.

Chronic insomnia can also be divided into two different categories. The two categories include,

- Primary insomnia. This is a case of insomnia that does not appear to be related to any other underlying health issues.
- Secondary insomnia. This type of insomnia can be caused by some health related problem, such as asthma, or arthritis. Anything that causes pain, which does not allow you to sleep well, can cause secondary insomnia. Some medications may also cause insomnia, as well as caffeine, stress, or some type of emotional or mental health issue. In addition, secondary insomnia can be caused by a poor sleep environment, such as too much light, a bad mattress, etc.

What can you do about insomnia?

Because insomnia can be such a serious health risk, if you are suffering from insomnia, you may want to talk with your healthcare provider, especially if you are unsure of what the source of your sleeplessness is. Before seeing your doctor, it may be helpful to keep a sleep diary for a week or two, so that you can keep track of your sleep patterns.

When you visit your doctor, you will likely get a physical to eliminate any possible health problem that may be causing your insomnia; if there is no underlying health issue, your doctor may recommend that you see a specialist to help with your problem.

How is insomnia commonly treated?

A short-term insomnia problem that is caused by a disruption in your sleep pattern, such as with jet lag, or a short illness, will likely correct itself. If you are having sleep problems that do not seem to be getting better, there are several possible treatments that your doctor may suggest.

- The first step in treating chronic insomnia may involve finding, and treating any medical condition that could be contributing to the problem.
- Paying attention to any routine or behavior that could be contributing to chronic insomnia. This may include drinking alcohol, or drinks that contain caffeine too late in the day.
- Using sleeping pills may be another way in which to treat chronic insomnia, but be aware that there is some debate about the safety during long-term use. Talk with your doctor before deciding on this mode of treatment for your insomnia.
- Some experts suggest using a relaxation therapy to help cure chronic insomnia. Relaxation therapy helps to relieve your body and mind of stress, which can help you to fall asleep faster.

What can you do to help with insomnia?

Here are a few things you can do yourself, to help ease the problem of chronic insomnia.

- Eliminate naps during the day. Obviously if you are sleeping during the day, this could contribute to being unable to sleep at night. Try to stay awake during the day, and only sleep at night.
- Establish a sleep routine. For some reason, a number of people will sleep better if they have a sleep routine. To establish a sleep routine you will need to go to bed about the same time each night, and get up approximately the same time every morning.
- Reduce or eliminate your use of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol; especially later in the day, or at night.
- Ensure that you are getting regular exercise. Regular exercise not only will help to keep you fit, and in good health, it also seems to help treat insomnia. If you exercise, make sure that it is during the day, or at least 5 hours before your normal bedtime. By doing this, you can get enough exercise to help make you tired, but enough time will have elapsed that there is no longer excessive adrenaline in your system to contribute to insomnia.
- Do not eat right before you go to bed. After you eat, this can cause indigestion, which could prevent you from getting quality sleep. For this reason, do not eat for about 2 to 3 hours before you go to bed.

- Sleep in a dark, and quiet environment. This is important for getting enough quality sleep. If you have a problem with light invading your sleeping space, you could try using a mask to cover your eyes while you sleep. If there is too much noise to sleep, use earplugs, or possibly a fan to help cover up the outside noise.
- Relax before trying to go to bed. One of the biggest reasons that people tend to toss and turn when they go to bed is that they are still wound of from their day. If you have a relaxation routine to help release tension, you will likely fall asleep much easier. Try taking a hot bath, listening to music, or reading a book. These relaxation routines can do wonders for helping ease the tension that has been building all day, and you'll be surprised at how quickly you will get sleepy.
- Ensuring that you have a comfortable bed that will be helpful in sleeping. Obviously, if you are sleeping on a lumpy old mattress, this could lead to chronic insomnia. Sleeping on a bad mattress can lead to back pain, poor circulation; in addition, some older mattresses can actually aggravate asthma and allergies. If you think your mattress could be contributing to your insomnia, you may want to consider shopping around for a new mattress and box springs set. A comfortable mattress can make all the difference when it comes to getting a good night's sleep.
- If you have been in bed more than 20 minutes without falling asleep, it may be a good idea to get up and do something until you get tired. Do something that is relaxing, and not too active, such as reading. Return to bed when you become drowsy.
- If you find that as soon as your head hits the pillow your mind is racing with all the things you need to do, or other worries, try to push all thoughts from your head, and concentrate on a relaxing place, such as a quiet beach, a mountain retreat.

If after trying these remedies, you still cannot find relief from chronic insomnia, it may be time to discuss the problem with your doctor. There could very well be some underlying mental, or physical health problem that you are not aware of. If this is the case, your doctor can either diagnose the problem, or send you to a specialist who can better treat your condition.

A good night's sleep is very important for your physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing; it is never a good idea to let chronic insomnia go untreated.