



## Insomnia

**Why is sleep so essential?** Sleep is an opportunity for your body to repair itself, both physically (e.g., repairing muscles) and psychologically (working through anxiety). When factors such as anxiety (physiological hyper-arousal), depression (emotional distress and worry), or poor sleep habits interfere with sleep patterns, the natural ability of the body to repair itself becomes disrupted. If sleep is disrupted for an extended period of time it can lead to:

- Increased emotional distress and irritability
- Increased clumsiness and poor coordination
- Decreased work performance and memory lapses
- Difficulty concentrating

**Insomnia.** Insomnia is difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep for long enough to feel refreshed the next morning. It's a common problem thought to regularly affect around one in every three people in the UK, and is particularly common in elderly people. **If you have insomnia, you may:**

- Find it difficult to fall asleep
- Lie awake for long periods at night
- Wake up several times during the night
- Wake up early in the morning and not be able to get back to sleep
- Not feel refreshed when you get up
- Find it hard to nap during the day, despite feeling tired
- Feel tired and irritable during the day and have difficulty concentrating

Occasional episodes of insomnia may come and go without causing any serious problems, but for some people it can last for months or even years at a time. Persistent insomnia can have a significant impact on your quality of life. It can limit what you're able to do during the day, affect your mood, and lead to relationship problems with friends, family and colleagues.

**How much sleep do I need?** There are no official guidelines about how much sleep you should get each night because everyone is different. On average, a "normal" amount of sleep for an adult is considered to be around seven to nine hours a night. Children and babies may sleep for much longer than this, whereas older adults may sleep less. **However, what is important is whether you feel you get enough sleep, and whether your sleep is good quality.** You're probably not getting enough good-quality sleep if you constantly feel tired throughout the day and it's affecting your everyday life.

**What causes insomnia?** It's not always clear what triggers insomnia, but it's often associated with:

- Stress and anxiety
- A poor sleeping environment – such as an uncomfortable bed, or a bedroom that's too light, noisy, hot or cold
- Lifestyle factors – such as jetlag, shift work, or drinking alcohol or caffeine before going to bed
- Mental health conditions – such as depression and schizophrenia
- Physical health conditions – such as heart problems, other sleep disorders and long-term pain
- Certain medicines – such as some antidepressants, epilepsy and steroid medicines

**Normal Cortisol Rhythm - A Key to Better Sleep.** Cortisol is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands, which helps regulate many body functions including blood sugar regulation and is also a strong determinant in how rejuvenating sleep will be. Cortisol is produced in a 24-hour cyclic fashion (circadian rhythm) with the highest levels being released in the morning [the reason why we wake] and the lowest at night.

**What can you do about it?** Good sleep hygiene (good sleep habits) can help you to develop a healthy sleep routine. To help you get a good night's sleep, here are some ideas for you to try and some to avoid.

## Try to:

- Setting regular times for going to bed and waking up - this will help you develop a sleep pattern.
- A warm bath, a warm milky drink, reading or listening to soothing music may help you relax before you go to sleep.
- Using thick curtains or blinds, an eye mask and earplugs to stop you being woken up by light and noise.
- Take regular exercise, but no strenuous activity within four hours before you go to bed as this may disturb your sleep.
- Only go to sleep when you're feeling sleepy. If you can't sleep, go to a different room and read, listen to quiet music or do something relaxing until you feel sleepy.
- Make sure your room isn't too hot or cold, or too noisy. Have a supportive mattress on your bed. Wear ear plugs or an eye mask if it helps you filter out any noise or light.
- Use your bedroom for sleep and sex only and not for work – never watch TV in bed.
- Writing a list of your worries, and any ideas about how to solve them, before going to bed to help you forget about them until the morning.

## Avoid:

- Don't have drinks that contain caffeine or alcohol within six hours before going to bed.
- Don't smoke before going to bed.
- Don't have heavy or rich meals, especially within a few hours before you go to bed.
- Try not to look at your clock. This is because it might make you feel more frustrated about being awake and stop you getting back to sleep.
- Turn off or put away electronic devices that have screens, for example phones, tablets and televisions.
- Don't take naps during the day. Napping during the day can make it difficult for you to sleep at bedtime.

**Behavioural therapies.** The following therapies can help you learn about improving your sleep.

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) helps you to deal with any worries that may lead to sleep problems. It can also help you develop positive ideas about sleep, reducing any worrying about the consequences of not getting enough sleep.
- Stimulus-control therapy can help you to connect your bed with going to sleep and to create a regular sleep routine. It may involve you getting out of bed and doing something relaxing if you're unable to fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes.
- Relaxation therapy can help you relax your muscles and clear your mind of distracting thoughts.
- Sleep-restriction therapy limits the amount of time you spend in bed to the time when you're actually asleep. You may go to sleep later and wake up earlier to make you spend more time in bed asleep.

## Nutrition Tips To Improve Sleep:

**Keep Blood Sugar Levels Balanced** To prevent cortisol and the circadian rhythm being disrupted, try to: Eat 3 balanced meals (inc. breakfast) and healthy snacks in between (if necessary) that are low in sugar, high in protein, vegetables and fibre.

**Protein** contains the sleep-promoting amino acid (AA) Tryptophan that is converted to produce the more system-calming neurotransmitter serotonin. **Sources:** include eggs, lean meats, dairy, white fish, soya and pulses.

**Carbohydrates** make tryptophan more available to the brain. Always choose healthy complex carbohydrates, but not eaten too near bedtime. **Sources:** oats, quinoa, amaranth, brown rice, pulses, starchy veg, etc.

**B Vitamins** are used for the synthesis and release of neurotransmitters and hormones involved with sleep and the circadian rhythm. **Sources:** wholegrains, leafy greens, mushroom, avocados, tuna, bananas, lentils and lean meats such as chicken and turkey.

**Calcium** a natural relaxant, has a calming effect on the body's nervous system. **Sources:** nuts, green leafy vegetables, salmon, sardines & dairy foods.

**Zinc** deficiency is linked to insomnia. **Sources:** almonds, oysters, eggs, mushrooms, sunflower & pumpkin seeds & leafy greens.

**Iron** deficiency can cause symptoms similar to restless leg syndrome. **Sources:** meats, soya, egg yolks, dark green vegetables, apricots & chickpeas (veg sources + vitamin C).

**Magnesium** calms nerves, relaxes muscles and relieves stress and anxiety. **Sources:** soya, nuts, leafy greens, avocados, bananas, apples & wholegrains

**Please Note:** This handout should only be used as a guide to help inform you as to the diet and lifestyle modifications that **may** help to support insomnia. It **should not** be used as definitive guide to Insomnia. If you think you may have Insomnia then please contact your medical doctor.