

Insomnia...what can I do about it?

Insomnia

The amount of sleep one needs varies from person to person. Some people need 10 - 12 hours a night while others like Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher famously functioned on about 3 - 4 hours a night. For the rest of us it's somewhere in between. For those with insomnia, it can become a real nightmare not only affecting their sleeping hours but their waking ones as well...



What is insomnia?

Insomnia is the inability to fall asleep, or to stay asleep long enough to get a proper night's rest. This can make you feel permanently tired. Insomnia has become a common problem with up to 25% of Australians reporting trouble getting enough sleep.

Causes

There is usually no single cause of insomnia, but a number of factors can contribute:

- psychological health problems such as stress or anxiety
- physical health problems such as asthma or pain
- medicines like those taken for asthma, vertigo and depression
- jet lag
- environmental factors such as noise, an uncomfortable bed or being too hot or cold
- lifestyle habits (e.g. eating late at night, drinking alcohol or using stimulants such as nicotine or other drugs)

A lack of sleep may also increase the risk of certain health conditions including high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

How does insomnia affect my body?

To understand the effects of insomnia or lack of quality sleep, we need to understand sleep. Sleep is a complicated process involving your body and brain. During sleep your body tissues are repaired and your cells rejuvenate. During the day your brain receives a lot of input and it needs to process, sort out, reject and record data during sleep. For this to be effective, an average person needs about 8 hours of sleep.

When this process is incomplete, your body and brain are not fully fit for the next day's activity. You feel very tired, fatigued, your energy levels are reduced and your reflexes slow down. Your senses become blunted.

"Lack of attention, dizzy spells and mood changes are other effects caused by sleepless nights."

Your mental functions like your ability to learn, remember and concentrate are affected by insomnia. Your performance level in the workplace drops. Your mind becomes sluggish and loses concentration. Lack of attention, dizzy spells and mood changes are other effects caused by sleepless nights. Some people become very irritable and flare up for no reason. It may sometimes lead to emotional problems and depression. In chronic cases, when people suffer from severe insomnia and sleepless nights for a long period of time, they can even experience hallucinations.

What can I do about it?

There are a number of things that you can do to help overcome insomnia.

- Reduce your caffeine intake, especially late in the day;
- Drink alcohol in moderation. It may make you sleepy, but it will cause you to wake up early;
- Don't have heavy or rich meals, especially in the few hours before bed;

- If you smoke, try to stop. Night-time breathing problems are more likely in smokers;
- Take regular exercise, but not just before bed;
- Meditation and exercise such as yoga can have a relaxing affect, helping prepare your body for sleep;
- Try a massage to relax the body and ease tension from muscles that may be painful or the cause of an uncomfortable night's sleep;
- Try to get into a daily routine to establish a sleep rhythm. Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning;
- Don't take lengthy naps during the day;
- If you can't sleep, get up and read until you feel sleepy or do something you find relaxing. Don't watch television as this can stimulate the mind, and try not to lie in bed thinking about how much sleep you are missing;
- Try taking a warm bath, having a warm milk drink or listening to soothing music before going to bed;
- Make sure your room isn't too hot or too cold, and that your bed is comfortable;
- Mentally dealing with the day's unfinished business is also helpful. Write down any worries before you go to bed—you can deal with them the next day. This may help to clear them from your mind and prevent them re-surfacing in the early hours.



Can massage help?

For those of us that have trouble relaxing and releasing tension, massage has been proven to be very beneficial on many levels. Massage releases endorphins (the body's natural pain killer) and **allows the muscles and tissues to lengthen and relax**. Massage allows the brain to enter into what is termed an "alpha state". Where beta represents arousal, alpha represents non-arousal. The mind slows down and enters into a meditative state.

What about Musculoskeletal Therapy?

Musculoskeletal Therapy focuses on getting the body into alignment and balance by easing it back to its natural state. It helps to correct postural complaints and **ease pain** which may help you have a more comfortable night's sleep. If your body is in alignment, your muscles won't need to work as hard, reducing your pain levels and **allowing for a more comfortable sleep** which is pain free and relaxed.

Foods to eat for relaxation

Sometimes it is difficult to avoid things like jet lag, travel, shift work, medication side effects, and pain or discomfort. **Think about what you are eating** and in particular during times of stress and anxiety. Try to increase your intake of **pastas, cereals, nuts, bananas and oily fish**. These foods have been proven to calm and relax the body and encourage sleep.

Exercise

Exercise is crucial in de-stressing the body, tiring out the muscles and assisting with sleep. A good walk, swim or yoga session can help to relax the body as well as clear the head.

Make sure you speak with your doctor if you:

- Can't sleep due to illness, pain or discomfort
- Stop breathing for short periods during sleep (sleep apnea)
- Wake up coughing, wheezing or unable to breathe
- Have been taking sleeping tablets for more than 4 weeks



How can natural therapies help me?



Acupuncture

In Traditional Chinese Medicine the organs **kidney, liver, heart and spleen** are the governing vessels of sleep. If any of these are unbalanced or dysfunctional sleep problems can occur. These individual elements need to be stimulated or subdued with acupuncture depending on how your symptoms are presenting. The Chinese believe that anxiety, depression, overwork and diet can all contribute to disturbed sleep.

What about Chinese herbs?

There are many different herb combinations when combined with acupuncture treatments can support a peaceful night's sleep. Treatments and herbs will vary depending on the individual. Acupuncture is used to create a balance in the body's yin and yang systems and to restore harmony and promote

relaxation. **Assiram now offers acupuncture 6 days a week** - both Traditional Chinese style and Japanese. Please phone (07) 3229 0115 and ask for an appointment with **Hamish or Susan** if you are suffering from sleep problems.

ASSIRAM CORPORATE MASSAGE

Don't forget we also offer Corporate visits where our therapists come to your office. We currently look after many companies in the Brisbane CBD and city fringe area. Discover how regular massages can benefit your workplace environment by phoning our Corporate Manager Christine on 3229 0115 to find out more!



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