



women's
health clinic

Insomnia: How to have a good night's sleep

Most people have hard time going to sleep and staying asleep at some point in their lives. These periods of sleeplessness can come and go. You may find the following tips useful for those times where sleep isn't coming as easily as you'd like.

During the Day:

- Try not to nap during the day. Napping may make you feel less tired before bed.
- Try to avoid alcohol even if you feel it helps you relax before bed. Alcohol causes sleep disturbances that you may not be aware of or make you wake up during the night.
- Regular exercise during the day can help you fall asleep and sleep more soundly. Don't exercise within a few hours before going to bed. The energizing effects of exercise may keep you up.
- Limit caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks & chocolate) and other stimulants (MSG, decongestants, nicotine or amphetamine drugs). If you drink coffee, it's best to drink it earlier in the day and avoid it eight hours before you sleep.
- Set aside a time in early evening for thinking about problems or planning things. Make a "to do tomorrow" list so you don't have to remind yourself of things when you're in bed.

Before Bed:

- Set a routine to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends. Try reading, take a warm bath, or do some other relaxing activity before bed.
- Try to avoid having time in bed without sleeping. Instead, figure out how many hours you've actually been sleeping and add one hour to that. Gradually you can add a half hour to this total time in bed. A sleep diary can help you keep track of this.
- Try eating a light snack before going to bed. Don't eat too much. A glass of warm milk, or cheese and crackers may be all you need.

In Bed

- Don't *try* to fall asleep. The more you try, the more trouble you may have. Despite popular belief, you don't really "fall" into sleep. When your body is relaxed enough and ready to sleep, it will quickly "jump" into the first stage of sleep without your awareness or effort.
- If you tend to watch the clock, turn it away so you don't see the time. The pressure of "I have to be up in a few hours" does not help your body relax.
- Your bedroom should be dark, quiet and a comfortable temperature. Most people sleep better when the temperature is slightly cool, but not cold. If noise is a problem you can consider wearing earplugs or use a fan to mask the noise – just be sure to turn up the volume on your alarm clock a little bit!
- If you're still awake after 30 minutes in bed, get up and go to another room. Tossing and turning in bed will only make you link your bed with feeling frustrated. Sit quietly in another room for 20 minutes - or until you feel tired - and then go back to bed. Do this as many times as you need to until you go to sleep.

Beyond Sleep:

- Learn a mental relaxation technique like meditation or deep breathing to help calm your body and mind.
- Seek counselling or therapy to help you manage issues that are cause stress in your life; they may be adding to your sleeplessness. Counselling can also help you manage your waking life when you're not sleeping.
- Even though most insomnia is temporary, going without sleep can be physically and mentally draining. Remember to go easy on yourself if you're not functioning as well you normally do. Let others help if they can.

Adapted from a handout developed by The Foundation for Medical Practice Education; www.fmpe.org. May 2008.

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