

# Insomnia

Difficulty in getting to sleep, interrupted sleep, or waking up too early.

## What to look for

- Inability to fall asleep.
- Waking up throughout the night.
- Waking up too early.

Insomnia is a rather common complaint and can be a short term problem where there is a temporary disturbance of one's normal sleeping pattern. Short-term insomnia usually lasts two or three weeks, and can accompany worry or stress and typically disappears when the apparent cause is resolved. It is not harmful but it can become a habit – hard to break.

Chronic insomnia is a more complex disorder in which the cause must be isolated by a doctor. This form of insomnia can have potentially serious effects especially upon the immune system.

## Causes

Most commonly, insomnia is caused by [stress](#), worry and [depression](#). However other causes include excessive caffeine consumption, terrible pain, [abuse of alcohol](#) or [drugs](#) and poor sleeping habits such as napping during the day.

Physical ailments can interfere with your sleep, especially disorders of the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas, and digestive system. Other important physical causes include heartburn and breathing disorders. Insomnia often accompanies [menopause](#). Abnormal blood sugar levels can cause people suffering from [diabetes](#) or [hypoglycaemia](#) to wake up during the night.

Sedentary behaviour and keeping an erratic schedule can contribute to insomnia. Over-the-counter drugs and prescription medications can interfere with sleep.

## Traditional Treatment

Transient insomnia usually disappears when you return to a regular sleep pattern. Short-term insomnia, which may be caused by the items listed above, may be treated with natural sleep aids or medication.

If your insomnia is more serious, your doctor will need to examine you and try to identify the cause. It may be necessary that you see other experts in this field as well.

There are medications available to enable you to sleep; however, doctors are hesitant to prescribe them in all cases as they can be highly addictive.

## **Alternative/Natural Treatments**

Usually people who are unable to sleep need help to relax and take their mind off their problem. Alternative therapies attempt to relax the individual.

**Aromatherapy** – A relaxant effect may be provided by oils of [chamomile](#) (*Matricaria recutita*), [lavender](#) (*Lavandula officinalis*), [neroli](#), [rose](#), and [marjoram](#). Add a few drops to your bathwater or sprinkle a few drops on a handkerchief and inhale

**Massage** – Can promote relaxation and better sleep. Can promote relaxation and better sleep.

**Herbal Therapies** – Half an hour before bedtime, drink a calming herbal tea made with [chamomile](#) (*Matricaria recutita*), [St.-John's-wort](#) (*Hypericum perforatum*), lime blossom, or [hops](#) (*Humulus lupulus*).

For insomnia from nervous tension, use vervain or [skullcap](#) (*Scutellaria lateriflora*). [Valerian](#) (*Valeriana officinalis*) is highly effective as well.

**Homoeopathy** – A homoeopathic practitioner may prescribe [Nux vomica](#) for insomnia caused by anxiety or restlessness, [Ignatia](#) for grief, or Muriaticum acidum for emotional problems. Other remedies are available, depending on the type of insomnia that is suffered.

**Lifestyle** – Exercise three or four times a week will help you sleep better and give you more energy. Exercise three or four times a week will help you sleep better and give you more energy.

**Meditation and yoga** – Can reduce tension and promote better sleep. Can reduce tension and promote better sleep.

## **Dietary Considerations**

[Calcium](#) and [magnesium](#) taken 45 minutes before bedtime have a tranquillising effect. As well as natural formulas such as valerian.

Avoid coffee, tea, cola drinks and alcohol.

High or low blood sugar can disrupt sleep patterns so avoid sweets and soft drinks before bed.

Warm milk may help in putting the restless person to sleep but do not drink too much as it is reported to be mucus forming.

## **Personal Care**

- Be sure your bedroom is quiet and dark.
- Earplugs
- Eye shades may help.
- Relax in a warm bath, listen to soft quiet music just before bed

- Try some [Aromatherapy oils](#) put on just before bed such as Marjoram.
- Do not stress if you wake up in the middle of the night, perhaps try to do some light reading to get back to sleep.
- Ensure you have enough ventilation and you feel comfortable in your room

Remember, a few nights of poor sleep do no long-term harm. Even if you toss and turn trying to get to sleep, you are probably getting more periods of sleep than you think.

### **When to seek further professional advice**

- You experience disturbed sleep for more than a month without apparent cause.
- Your insomnia is associated with an event
- Your sleep medication is no longer effective.
- You never seem to get enough sleep.