

What Is Insomnia?

People with insomnia have problems falling asleep or staying asleep. You may wake up during the night or wake up too early the next morning.

Insomnia is a common problem that affects almost everyone at some point. Without enough sleep, you may feel sleepy during the day. This can make you more likely to have an accident at work and can make driving dangerous. You may also feel irritable from lack of sleep. Some people have trouble remembering things, don't get as much done, and don't enjoy being with family and friends.

Having trouble sleeping from time to time is often linked to short-term stress. It can last for days to weeks. It often gets better in less than a month.

Insomnia can also develop into an ongoing sleep problem, especially when you worry about not sleeping well. This is called chronic insomnia. It is often a symptom of another health problem, such as depression or chronic pain. Chronic insomnia is less common than short-term sleep problems. It affects up to 10% to 15% of adults.

What Causes Insomnia?

There are many things that can cause sleep problems. Insomnia may be caused by:

- **Stress-** Stress can be caused by fear about a single event, such as giving a speech. Or you may have ongoing stress, such as worry about work.
- **Depression-** Anxiety and other mental or emotional conditions.
- **Poor sleep habits-** Watching TV in bed and/or not having a regular bedtime schedule. If you have trouble sleeping, you may worry about being able to fall asleep. This can make the problem worse.
- **Changes in your sleep habits or surroundings-** This includes changes that happen where you sleep, such as noise, light or sleeping in a different bed. It also includes changes in your sleep pattern, such as having jet lag or working a late shift.
- **Pain-** Breathing problems, restless leg syndrome and many other health problems.
- **Using things known to cause sleep problems-** These include stimulants, such as tobacco and caffeine, as well as certain medicines, alcohol and drugs.
- **Lack of regular exercise.**



What Are The Symptoms of Insomnia?

The symptoms of insomnia vary. You may have difficulty falling asleep, so you may toss and turn for what seems like a long time. You may wake up and have trouble falling back to sleep, perhaps several times during the night. You may wake up too early and not feel refreshed in the morning or tired or irritable during the day.

How Is It Diagnosed?

Insomnia is not a disease, and no test can diagnose it. But when you can't sleep well, it often has to do with some other cause. Your doctor will probably assess your current health and ask about any health problems you have had and if you are taking any medicine.

Sometimes a doctor will do a physical exam, blood tests, and, in some cases, sleep studies to help find out if you have a health problem that may be causing the insomnia.

Your doctor may also ask about your sleep history—how well you sleep, how long you sleep, bedtime habits, and any unusual behaviors. Your doctor may ask you to keep a sleep diary, which is a record of your sleep patterns, for a week or two. He or she may recommend a counselor if your symptoms point to a mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety.

How Is Insomnia Treated?

Treatment for insomnia focuses on the reason why you don't sleep well. If you have a medical problem, such as chronic pain, or an emotional problem, such as stress, treating that problem may help you sleep better. You may be able to sleep better by making some small changes. It may help to:

- Go to bed at the same time each night.
- Get up at the same time each day.
- Avoid caffeine or alcohol for several hours before bedtime.
- Get regular exercise.
- Avoid daytime naps.

Some people may need medication for a while to help them fall asleep. Doctors often prescribe medicine for a short time if other treatment isn't working. But medication doesn't work as well over time as do lifestyle and behavior changes. It can also become habit-forming. Medication works best as a short-term treatment combined with lifestyle and behavior changes. Your doctor may also recommend counseling, which can help you learn new habits that may help you sleep better.

Talk to your doctor about your sleep problems and any other health issues you may have. This is important, because lack of sleep can lead to depression, accidents, problems at work, marital and social problems, drinking more alcohol than usual and poor health.

How Common Is It?

Insomnia is very common and can affect people at any stage in life. One recent study reported that about one out of five children has insomnia. It is more common in women and older people. Almost half of older adults are affected by sleep problems, and up to 14% use sleeping pills. Sleep patterns also change as you get older, and many older adults sleep less than younger adults. If you are an older adult, you may have a harder time falling asleep, and your sleep may not be as deep. Health problems and medicines can also affect how much or how well you sleep. But having trouble getting to sleep or not sleeping well is not normal, no matter what your age. If you are having trouble sleeping, discuss it with your doctor at your next checkup.

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