

Insomnia

What is insomnia?

Having insomnia means you often have trouble falling or staying asleep or going back to sleep when you wake up. Insomnia can be either a short-term or a long-term problem.

Insomnia affects 1 in 3 adults every year in the US. Often insomnia lasts for just a few nights. If you cannot sleep almost every night for 2 weeks, tell your healthcare provider. Insomnia that lasts this long usually continues until the cause is identified and treated.

What is the cause?

Causes of insomnia include:

- Stress, such as a big deadline at work, a financial problem, or a sick family member
- Overweight
- Depression, anxiety, or other mental health problems
- Medical problems, such as sleep apnea or hyperthyroidism
- Restless leg syndrome, which means that the muscles in your lower legs twitch or tense up during sleep
- Use of caffeine or other stimulants
- Use of alcohol or sedative medicine, which relaxes you but can lead to shallow sleep that starts and stops, especially if you use it for a long time
- Use of other medicines, such as medicine used to treat asthma
- Pain or other discomfort caused by an illness, such as arthritis
- Shortness of breath caused by lung disease or heart failure
- Poor sleep habits, including going to bed at different times or in a noisy environment, or eating or working in bed before sleeping
- Changes in sleep patterns because of different work hours or travel (jet lag)

Insomnia may be temporary (called situational insomnia) or ongoing (chronic insomnia).

- Situational insomnia occurs with a stressful event. It is often caused by noise, pain, worry, or family, work, money, or school problems. It lasts 3 weeks or less. This kind of insomnia generally goes away when the stressful event is over.
- Chronic insomnia can be caused by irregular sleep-wake patterns resulting from shift work, drug dependency (including long-term use of sleeping pills or alcohol); stress; illness; or mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression. It lasts longer than 3 weeks and requires treatment of the underlying problem.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Trouble falling asleep (taking longer than 45 minutes)
- Waking up often in the night
- Waking up early in the morning and not being able to go back to sleep
- Not feeling rested in the morning or feeling tired during the day
- Restlessness or anxiety as you get close to bedtime

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Your provider will ask about your:

- Sleep patterns
- Use of caffeine, alcohol, medicine, and other drugs
- Eating and exercise habits
- Mental and physical condition
- Job and travel patterns

Your healthcare provider may also ask your family members about your sleep habits. You may have blood tests.

Your healthcare provider may ask you to take notes each morning about:

- How long you were in bed
- How much time you think you actually slept
- How many times and what times you woke up
- What time you got up in the morning
- Your thoughts about the quality of your sleep
- Recent stresses

Your healthcare provider may suggest that you sleep overnight in a sleep center. At the sleep center you may have a continuous, all-night recording of your breathing, eye movements, muscle tone, blood oxygen levels, heart rate and rhythm, and brain waves.

How is it treated?

If a medical problem is causing your insomnia, your provider will treat you for it. If drug or alcohol abuse is the cause of your insomnia, you will need to stop using these substances.

In some cases of situational insomnia, your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to help you sleep until the stressful event is over. Some sleeping medicine can be addictive. Your healthcare provider will work with you to choose the right medicine for short-term or long-term use.

Counseling may also help you deal with psychological problems or stress that may cause or contribute to your insomnia. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a

way to help you identify and change views you have of yourself, the world, and the future. CBT can make you aware of unhealthy ways of thinking. It can also help you learn new ways to think and act.

Your healthcare provider may recommend relaxation techniques, changes in diet, cutting out caffeine, and a healthy lifestyle that includes regular exercise. Your provider also will probably discuss good sleep habits and a regular sleep routine.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the full course of treatment your healthcare provider prescribes. Tell your healthcare provider if the treatment plan doesn't help or you have side effects from your medicine.
- Learn ways to manage stress. Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax. For example, take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Exercise regularly according to your healthcare provider's instructions.
- Try not to focus on falling asleep. For example, don't keep checking the clock and worry about why you are not asleep yet. If you are awake for more than 30 minutes, leave the bed and do not go back to bed until you feel ready to sleep.
- Contact your healthcare provider or therapist if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.
- Follow your provider's instructions for follow-up visits.

How can I help prevent insomnia?

- Practice good sleep hygiene:
 - Use the bedroom only for sleep and sex, not for reading or watching TV.
 - Keep the room dark and the temperature comfortable.
 - Consider listening to white noise, such as a fan blowing.
 - Keep active during the day. Exercise and get some fresh air.
 - Stick to a routine of going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.
 - Limit daytime naps to no more than 1 hour each day.
 - Avoid caffeine late in the day.
 - If you eat late at night, keep it light.
- Keep a healthy weight. Being overweight may cause tiredness during the day and may worsen sleep apnea.
- Stop smoking.
- Keep a "to do" journal. Before you go to bed, write down all the things you are worrying about. Then write down what you can do tomorrow. Mark the other things as things to do later in the week. This will help clear your mind of worry.

- Arrange your medicine schedule with your provider so that you take any drugs that might make you sleepy in the evening and drugs that may interfere with sleep during the day.
- Avoid daily use of sleep medicines. You may become dependent on them or build up your tolerance to them so that they no longer work as well. Most sleeping pills should not be used for more than 2 weeks in a row.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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