

Managing Insomnia: Good Sleep Habits Promote Sleep

Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to fall and stay asleep. It is not comfortable for a patient with pain to toss and turn all night and watch the clock and the window for signs of morning. Even worse, pain can aggravate poor sleep, and a poor night's sleep can aggravate pain. However, there are things you can do- simple things that can help you with insomnia. It may take a week or two before you experience relief, but don't get discouraged. Follow these suggestions carefully.

Get rid of any habits that might contribute to sleep problems

- People use caffeine to stay awake. Don't drink caffeinated beverages, especially in the late afternoon or evening. Coffee, tea, and soft drinks all contain caffeine. But it can be found in other things too- in chocolate and in cocoa, for example. Even some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine. Ask your doctor to check any medications you are taking to see if they contain caffeine. Some of the medicines that contain caffeine include:
 - allergy, anxiety, depression, epilepsy, nausea, and thyroid medicines
 - cold, cough, and decongestant (nose and chest) medicines
 - diuretics
 - painkillers
- Tobacco products are bad for your health at any time. But nicotine is a stimulant that also interferes with your ability to sleep, so avoid it, especially at night.
- Alcohol can also interfere with sleep, so do not drink it before bedtime. Alcohol may help you fall asleep because it slows brain activity, but it has a "rebound" effect and will awaken you later in the night.
- Don't take naps, if possible. This will help ensure that by bedtime you will be sleepy. If a nap is unavoidable, try to make do with one that lasts less than an hour.
- Don't eat a heavy meal before bedtime. A digestive system that has been activated can keep you awake; it can also cause indigestion and acid reflux. A light snack will ensure that an empty stomach will not wake you up. Dairy products like milk contain tryptophan, a substance that acts as a natural sleep inducer. However, drinking excessively before bedtime can interfere with your sleep by requiring excessive trips to the bathroom.
- Regular exercise is not only good for your health in general; it is also a great sleep aid. But timing is critical. Do not schedule a workout 3 or 4 hours before bedtime. Morning or early afternoon exercise regimens are best.

Create a comfortable sleep environment

- Your bedroom temperature should be on the cool side, but not cold. A hot room can be uncomfortable.
- Your room should be dark and quiet. To block out light, get a night shade or use a sleep mask.
- If noise is a problem, either wear earplugs or get a "white noise" machine to block sound.

- Be sure your mattress is comfortable. An uncomfortable mattress can affect your sleep considerably. If necessary, buy a new mattress. Experiment with different levels of firmness to get the one best suited to your needs.

Cultivate good sleep habits

- Do not go to bed until you are sleepy. If you are not ready to fall asleep, then stay up until you are. You can not force yourself to fall asleep.
- Calm your mind before you attempt to sleep. Do not worry about things in bed. Before retiring, listen to soothing music, read something relaxing, do meditation exercises.
- Do not use the bed for anything except sleeping. Do not eat, watch television, balance your checkbook, make phone calls or lists, or do anything else in bed (sex is fine) except sleep. That is what beds are for.
- Once in bed, if you are not asleep within approximately 20 minutes or so, get up and leave the bedroom. Do not return until you are sleepy.
- Try to get up and go to bed at the same time, even on weekends. Getting your body used to a regular sleep schedule will help with your sleep cycle.