



INSOMNIA

What is Insomnia?

Insomnia is said to be present when you regularly find it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep, generally longer than 30 minutes.

It has several patterns;

1. You may have trouble getting to sleep initially.
2. Even if you can fall asleep, you might not be able to stay asleep for as long as you would like.
3. You may wake up during the night and be unable to go back to sleep for a long time.

Many people have two of the above problems, or even all three. As a result, you might feel tired during the day.

Insomnia impacts on daily life causing:

- Lack of energy
- Irritability
- Poor performance at work
- Memory difficulties
- Concentration problems

Spending too much time in bed 'trying to sleep' will make your sleep worse.

What causes Insomnia?

Insomnia has many causes which can include:

- Some medicines and drugs, e.g. asthma or blood pressure medication, caffeine, alcohol or smoking
- Chronic pain and other uncomfortable illnesses
- Stress at work or in your personal life
- Depression
- A friend or loved one passing away
- Anxiety and worrying, including worrying about not getting enough sleep
- Another sleep problem

Sometimes there is no clear cause for insomnia, in which case it is called primary insomnia.

How does it affect people?

You might feel that it's harder to focus and remember things. Most people think their memory is worse than it really is. The same goes for concentration. Your risk of a traffic accident or other injury may be higher (see Drowsy Driving). Lack of sleep may cause you to be more emotional or experience depressed moods. Some people feel sleepy during the day, but this can be caused by many things (see Excessive Daytime Sleepiness).

How is it treated?

Treating insomnia reduces health risks and helps people feel better and more confident about their sleep.

Treatment depends on what is causing the insomnia. For example;

- If poor sleep habits are the cause, then these need to be improved. Your doctor or Sleep Coach can assist with improving your sleep habits.
- If your sleep habits seem to be okay but you are still having problems, then you may need more specialist help. A Sleep Coach and cognitive-behavioural therapy for insomnia has been shown to be more effective in the medium and long term.
- Stress, **depression** and **anxiety** are best treated by specialists, but taking steps to improve your sleep can also help with these.
- Sometimes **sleep specialists** will suggest a **sleep study** to be sure they understand what may be causing the poor sleep and to check for **sleep apnea**.



What about sleeping pills?

If you only take them occasionally, sleeping pills can get you a good night's sleep. However, if you take them often, you will get used to them and they will stop working as effectively. Also, they can be habit forming and it can then become difficult to stop taking them. Always speak to your doctor before starting or stopping medications.

Where and when should you seek help?

If you are having ongoing trouble sleeping, persistent problems with mood, restlessness in bed, severe snoring or waking unrefreshed, make sure you see your doctor. Your GP can refer you to a sleep specialist or psychologist.