

INSOMNIA

What you need to know

Insomnia is persistent difficulty falling or staying asleep, or poor quality sleep. A person can be diagnosed with chronic insomnia if their symptoms occur at least three times a week and last longer than three months. Stressors are often associated with insomnia.

Types of Insomnia

Primary insomnia: acute; not associated with other health conditions. Its cause isn't well understood, but it seems to be triggered by things like life events (job loss/change, death of a loved one, moving, divorce, planning a major event (wedding, etc.)). Acute primary insomnia may resolve on its own and not need any kind of treatment.

Secondary insomnia: a more chronic type of insomnia; often associated with other medical conditions (asthma, arthritis, cancer, heartburn, pain, etc.), mental health conditions (depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc.), medications, etc. This kind of insomnia may require some treatment. You should see your physician to get help in managing your condition so you can sleep and rest better. Behavioral therapy may help you change the things you do that contribute to or worsen your insomnia; it can also help you learn to do things that can promote better sleep hygiene.

The stages of sleep

We cycle through these stages as we sleep. Experts believe the various stages allow our brains/bodies to recuperate and develop. People with insomnia may not spend enough time in any/all stages.

Stage 1: transitional period of drifting off to sleep but can still be easily awakened (typically 1 – 5 minutes)

Stage 2: the time period when more relaxation and light sleep starts to occur; people spend approximately half their sleep time in Stage 2

Stage 3: progressive, deeper and more restorative sleep when vital sign changes (BP, pulse, metabolism) start to decrease and slow; may be vital to body recovery/growth, bolstering immune system, creativity, memory

Stage 4: REM sleep. Brain activity increases, dreams become more vivid; may be crucial to cognitive functions such as learning, memory, creativity

Tips for healthy sleep hygiene

- Establish the same bedtimes/wake times (circadian rhythm)
- Routine walks and exercise daily
- Avoid blue light (phone, tablet, computer/tv screens) for 30+ minutes before bedtime
- Establish bedtime routines (reading, wash face, brush teeth), room temp (60-67°)
- Comfortable environment (dark/quiet)
- Relaxing bath (try lavender oil)

THE EFFECTS OF INSOMNIA

- Fatigue/malaise
- Difficulty focusing/concentrating
- Difficulties in social settings
- Irritability/mood changes
- Decreased energy/motivation
- Hyperactivity
- Aggression
- Impulsivity/other behavioral issues

THINGS TO AVOID BEFORE BED

- Heavy food
- Blue light: cell phone/tablet/computer
- Physical training/exertion/workouts
- Alcohol and smoking
- Caffeine
- Stress
- Arguments
- Upsetting issues/worries
- Being in pain

RISK FACTORS

- Women
- Stress
- Over the age of 60
- No regular routine or schedule
- Mental/physical issues