

**B**oth doctors and patients realise sleep is important. Patients know how groggy, irritable and unproductive they are after a night of too little sleep. Sleep controls almost everything in the body: including memory, mood, temperature, hormonal control, bone growth, immunity, tissue repair, pain control, and so on. A chronic lack of sleep is bad for our health and makes us vulnerable to illnesses and conditions from weight gain to bad skin to diabetes. None of this helps patients who struggle with a Sleep Disorder.

There are over 80 different Sleep Disorders in the current International Classification of Sleep Disorders. Almost any of them can present as Insomnia. However,

what's generally referred to as 'Chronic Insomnia' is made up of a number of different factors, including Bad sleep habits, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, the use of chemicals like alcohol and so on. The definition of Insomnia is of a problem at night coupled with a problem during the day. In other words, if someone is functioning well during the day then, by definition, they don't have Insomnia, even if the length of sleep is not necessarily what they would like. There are normal short sleepers



and normal long sleepers, and the amount of sleep needed by any individual is genetically determined.

The crucial thing to look out for in Insomnia is the level of daytime functioning.

There is still so much that scientists don't fully understand about sleep, and new information is continually being uncovered. How much we need, how to sleep better and how our sleep-related habits affect our health. About 15% of adults suffer from Chronic Insomnia.

# ***The Power of Restful Sleep - And How to Get Some***

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Nearly as many suffer occasional bouts of Depression. Insomnia and Depression often go hand-in-hand. While approximately 10 -15% of people with Depression sleep too much, as many as 80% have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Patients with persistent Insomnia are more than three times more likely to develop Depression, according to Neurologists and Psychiatrists. Depression can cause excessive sleepiness or difficulty sleeping and Sleep Disorders are not infrequent triggers for Depression and even Psychotic symptoms.

Many medications used for treating Depression are sedating, so if used at night they may be beneficial for sleep also. People who have Insomnia as a result of

Depression will generally find that although medications may improve the Depression, the Insomnia may not improve in parallel, needing separate treatment.

Anxiety is a very powerful cause of Insomnia. The effects of stress on sleep are generally due to Anxiety. Stress affects your feelings, your body, and the way you act. While the right amount of Stress can keep you alert and energetic, too much can harm your quality of life and keep you awake at night. Even though you might feel frazzled, you may try to get by on less sleep than you need. But better sleep can help you fight infections, boost your metabolism, and cut your chances of getting diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes.

Lack of sleep or poor quality sleep can cause Anxiety, Stress or Depression and can worsen these conditions to the extent they may become extremely difficult to control. This can quickly create a vicious cycle where people are scared they won't sleep, become highly anxious affecting their ability to sleep and worsening their Anxiety.

Recent research published in the Journal of Neuroscience found people who spent more time in REM sleep during the night showed lower fear-related brain activity the following day. REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep is the stage of sleep where dreaming occurs. The study's results suggest getting good REM sleep may make people less



prone to Trauma or fear-related health issues like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Anxiety. Researchers theorise this could be due to the fact that the area of the brain that releases nor-adrenaline (a hormone associated with stress) takes a break during REM sleep, making you less sensitive to stimuli that cause fear. They also believe REM sleep can reset the build-up of nor-adrenaline to normal levels.

Lack of sleep or poor quality sleep will frequently cause headaches, and will worsen any underlying pain condition, such as rheumatoid arthritis. Pain conditions will often disrupt sleep, thus creating a vicious cycle. It's frequently found that if the sleep is corrected, the pain may become significantly better.

All the experts, and sufferers, agree - Mental activity is a great problem in causing Insomnia. There needs to be a gap between the stresses of the day and getting into bed. Attention to hobbies, particularly creative activities before bed can be very useful. The bedtime routine is also very important, that is to say the last 30 minutes or so before getting into bed. The regular performance of certain things, such as brushing one's teeth or bathing can also help the wind down towards sleep.

Food generally acts as a stimulant – eating a big meal before bed keeps you awake or prevents staying asleep and some people use food to stay awake. The only dietary advice which has scientific backing is that you shouldn't go to bed hungry. The type of food or timing is irrelevant however.

While exercise is an excellent source of Stress relief, can help Depression and be useful to help Insomnia, it's important not to exercise just before bedtime. Exercise should be completed long



enough before attempting to sleep, otherwise it may actually make it more difficult to get to sleep. Being overly fatigued often results in non-REM sleep – and sleep that is not restful. It's extremely important to maintain a regular sleep schedule. As far as possible go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Remember not to stay too long in bed, that is to say a period of time which is so long that you're unable to sleep for the same amount of time. About 7 1/2 hours is usually best.

Ultimately, most people don't get the right sleep all the time. For many, sleep is a chronic issue.

Tips to help your patients get a good night's sleep and sweet dreams:

1. **Get one to two hours of direct sunlight exposure every day.** The sleep cycle is controlled by sunlight exposure in the morning. Indoor lighting is not bright enough – we all need the type of light intensity one gets in the shade of a tree (without using sunglasses).
2. **Do something boring before bed.** Mental stimulation and over-stimulation hinders sleep so keep the mundane, mind-numbing chores like folding socks for bedtime.
3. **Adjust the temperature.** Experts say the ideal temperature for sleep is around 15 – 20 degrees Celsius. A warm bath or shower may also be useful. Not only does it relax one, but it raises the body temperature. As you get out of the bath, the temperature starts dropping. A drop in temperature of the body is a trigger to sleep.
4. **Transform your bedroom into a sleep sanctuary.** A few adjustments like blackout curtains and comfortable bedding and pillows can make a huge difference. Your bedroom should be instantly soothing and relaxing.
5. **Don't hit the snooze button.** By continually hitting 'snooze' you are fragmenting your sleep further and you could feel more groggy and anxious than you would if you got up when your alarm rang the first time.

We live in a hurley-burley world and one in which we're continually being thrown information and Stress. It's crucial we allow time for our bodies and minds to unwind. There's no pill or secret cure for a lack of good sleep. We need the time to allow our bodies to move through the different stages of sleep as it naturally does to operate at our peak. And sweet dreams it seems, are part of that necessary package.

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