

Insomnia

Insomnia

Insomnia is a common medical disorder demonstrated by difficulty in falling and maintaining sleep coinciding with symptoms such as irritability and extreme feeling of tiredness during wakefulness. An estimated half of the people globally have insomnia at one time or another, while at some point, several individuals might have experienced short-term (acute) insomnia which can only last for days or weeks. Anxiety, stress and traumatic events cause short term insomnia. On the other hand, long term insomnia may last for months or more.



Each person may require a different duration of sleep although most people need to have 7-9 hours' sleep at night. Due to sleep disturbances, most people cannot appropriately perform their daily tasks because they may feel sleepy, tired, and irritable during the day and have difficulty concentrating and working at worst, people may also fall asleep while working and driving which predisposes them to several occupational and environmental risks.

Insomnia has implications on overall health and well-being since sleep is a requisite of our body to perform vital functions. During sleep, our body heals damaged cells, rejuvenate defenses in the immune system, recharging the brain and boosting the cardiovascular system and the heart. Lack of sleep can put terrible tension and stress on the nervous system, body and overall health.

Causes and Triggers

According to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), some psychiatric and medical conditions may trigger insomnia, unhealthy sleep habits, drugs or a specific substance, and specific biological factors. Insomnia may be the primary condition, or it may be the symptom of other underlying diseases. A most common cause of insomnia are the following:

- Poor sleep habits, like intake of caffeine-containing beverages at the time nearest to bedtime, heavy activities such as exercise during the night, or erratic sleep-wake schedule.
- Psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Awakening too early may be a sign of depression.
- Certain medications such as psychiatric drugs like antidepressants and medications for hypertension and bronchial asthma can cause sleep pattern disturbances as well. Some drugs may also contain caffeine and other stimulants that can make it difficult to fall asleep.
- Stress, such as due to ordinary life events such as hospitalization and loss of a job (adjustment insomnia) and excessive worrying about sleeplessness and another day of fatigue called psychophysiological insomnia.
- Diabetes, chronic pain, cancer, heart diseases, and overactive thyroid and neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases are strongly associated with insomnia.
- Aging also causes insomnia due to changes in sleep patterns, changes in activity, health-related changes, and medications to cope with age-related disorders.
- Primary causes of insomnia related to sleep disorders are the following:
 - Central Sleep Apnea, is a condition that causes breathing difficulty or makes breathing repeatedly stop during night sleep
 - Narcolepsy is a sleep disorder demonstrated by an excessive urge to sleep at daytime with uncontrollable episodes of falling asleep
 - Periodic limb movement disorder (PLMD), is recurrent cramping and jerking of legs during sleep.
 - Restless legs syndrome is a condition manifested by an uncontrollable urge to move the legs, usually attacks during an evening or nighttime hours and is often relieved by moving the legs.

Symptoms

Typical signs of signs and symptoms of insomnia are

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking up often during the night and having trouble going back to sleep
- Waking up too early in the morning
- Feeling tired upon waking

Diagnosis

Generally, tests aren't warranted if there are apparent symptoms for chronic or acute insomnia. However, doctors might refer people for further evaluation with the sleep specialist. Some of the most common reasons are the following:

- An uncertain diagnosis

- Disorders mainly related to sleep such as apnea, narcolepsy, and periodic limb movement disorder, and restless leg syndrome
- Severe dependence on sleeping aids such as over the counter drugs
- Presence of warning signs or other symptoms such as nightmares and twitching of the legs or arms during sleep
- Visible signs and symptoms of psychiatric disorders such as depression and bipolar disorders

Treatment and Management

Mild cases of insomnia and acute insomnia may not require medical treatment. Following good sleep habits or sleep hygiene can manage the symptoms of acute insomnia. There are also over-the-counter remedies such as melatonin pills to help in falling asleep. Below are recommended good sleep habits to help overcome insomnia.

- Do more activities during the day, do regular work routines and exercise in the daytime to make the body tired. The post-exercise drop in the body temperature helps in falling asleep. However, it is not advisable to do exhaustive exercise during the night because it activates the stress response system making it harder to fall asleep.
- You may also benefit from deep breathing exercises as it helps to silence the mind and promotes calmness in the body
- If possible, limit or entirely avoid food and drinks containing caffeine and alcohol. It would also be helpful to avoid products comprised of nicotine such as cigars, snuff, e-cigarettes, and snus. These goods are stimulants that can hinder good sleep.
- Limit activities in bed into sex and sleep; avoid light-emitting gadgets such as mobile phones, tablets, television and eBook readers at least an hour before sleep.
- Avoid eating heavy meals at night; light meals should be eaten to make it easy for the body to digest the food and not interfere during sleeping time
- Some over the counter remedies may be used to manage acute insomnia such as diphenhydramine or doxylamine (both are antihistamines) and a naturally occurring hormone called melatonin. However, Over the counter medications should not be used for more than 7 to 10 days. If symptoms persist, it is best to seek medical help. Sleep aids are also not advisable to older people.

If insomnia restricts the regular activities and the health of a person, attending physician usually gives prescription medications and may also offer some non-drug interventions.

- A trained sleep therapist provides cognitive behavioral therapy by asking people to keep a sleep diary and help people unlearn unhealthy sleep hygiene, dismiss unhealthy thoughts, and relaxation training
- Among the most commonly used medications are anti-anxiety and sedative drugs, while most are safe, it is still needed to be continuously supervised by the physician.