

Your Health Reference Sheet

Topic: Insomnia

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Sleep is absolutely essential for good health because it's the time when the body detoxifies, repairs, rebuilds, and rejuvenates itself. It's when bone marrow and lymph nodes produce a substance that enables the immune system to effectively protect the body from bacterial and viral infections. Sleep is possibly the number one predictor of the state of the body. Good solid sleep patterns create good health, and poor sleep patterns create poor health.

The latest sleep research conducted by the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center revealed that over 77 percent of Americans suffer from insomnia and other sleep-related disorders. This same research revealed that people who suffer from chronic insomnia are at a much higher risk of having impaired immune systems; having rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, and other neurodegenerative diseases; developing cardiovascular disease and cancer; having a stroke; and dying prematurely.

So, finding a solution to restore good sleep patterns isn't just important, it's imperative. However, sleeping pills aren't the answer, because they begin to lose their effectiveness in as little as three to five days of usage; and they can compound the problem because of their side effects. The best ways to deal with insomnia are to find out what's causing it and then treat the cause rather than the effect; to use meditation rather than medication; to find ways to effectively deal with daily stressors; and to use natural self-help methods.

The benefits from getting a good night's sleep are many. They include helping to keep the metabolism running efficiently, which means it's easier to keep weight in check. Sleep minimizes the symptoms associated with PMS and menopause, and it reduces the irritability associated with stress. It improves immune system functioning, so it helps protect our bodies from illnesses and infections. It reduces the effects of chronic pain and associated symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Sleep slows down the brain waves, slows down muscle activity, drops blood pressure, and increases the flow of healing hormones, neurotransmitters, and endorphins, all of which are needed to rebuild tissue and revitalize the body.

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General Description

Insomnia can best be described in terms of both duration and severity. It's characterized by the inability to fall asleep and stay asleep. People with insomnia feel as though they have not had sufficient sleep when they awaken.

Sleep isn't a static condition, but actually a dynamic condition where changes are continually taking place during the sleep period. These changes reflect the different brain wave patterns. The period of REM, or rapid eye movement, is when we dream; and then there's an even deeper REM stage, which occurs early in the night. This early stage of REM is when the activities of the brain are focused on detoxifying and repairing the body.

After infancy, our brain functioning adjusts and eventually adheres to a natural cycle that repeats itself every 24 hours. This natural, inner cycle is called the circadian rhythm. This cycle trains the brain when it should sleep and when it should awaken. When the circadian rhythm is disrupted, the brain *tries* to go to sleep but it can't. This causes the brain to become aroused as it tries even harder to sleep. Over the course of time, the brain becomes conditioned that going to bed is associated with struggling to go to sleep, thus creating a vicious cycle. It knows it needs to sleep, but the chemical reaction of arousal won't let it. The outcome is insomnia and, ultimately, sleep deprivation.

In studies on insomnia, the lack of quality sleep has shown to raise levels of two adrenal hormones (cortisol and ACTH) associated with the pro-inflammatory cytokine, interleukin-6. Elevated levels of both have been linked to numerous degenerative diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease.

Sleep Disorders Associated with Insomnia

All sleep disorders are merely symptoms of something that's the real core issue. When someone suffers from any one of these sleep disorders, the best approach is to identify the underlying cause.

Sleep disorders can be described in the following ways:

- **Transient Insomnia** – This is associated with a temporary disturbance in normal sleep patterns, usually caused by moving from one time zone to another. It usually lasts no more than a night or two.
- **Short-term Insomnia** – This is a disruption in normal sleep patterns lasting about two or three weeks and is usually accompanied by worry and stress.