
Insomnia Summary **revised 11Jun2007**

What is insomnia?

Insomnia is difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, and results in disturbed and unsatisfying sleep. Insomnia may last only a short time, related to difficult events in our lives. For many people, however, insomnia is a long lasting problem, not caused by depression or anxiety.

Causes of Insomnia

We often sleep poorly when we are affected by:

- Stress or anxiety
- Side effects of medications or alcohol
- Other sleep disorders such as sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome
- Poor sleep habits, irregular schedules, or an uncomfortable sleep environment.

For some people, insomnia is a long-term problem, possibly resulting from a relative shortage of sleep-promoting chemicals in the brain. Insomnia may occur in people with depression, but usually insomnia is not a sign of psychological problems.

Insomnia causes other medical problems.

People who have long-lasting insomnia have a higher risk of:

- Depression
- Car crashes
- Poor quality of life

Insomnia Treatments

There are 3 main therapies for insomnia:

1. Most people can treat themselves effectively and safely by improving sleep habits. See additional sheet "General Suggestions for Improving Sleep Hygiene."
2. Some people may benefit from a series of cognitive and behavioral treatments with a psychologist, and some people need treatment with medications.
3. Some people need prescription medication to relieve insomnia. In general:
 - Prescription medications for insomnia are safer than over-the-counter medications.
 - Prescription medications do not damage heart, liver, kidneys, or other organs.
 - Prescription medications carry a low risk of addiction, or no risk of addiction. Dose increases are not commonly needed.
 - Prescription sleep medications are effective and reliable aids to falling asleep, staying asleep, and improving the quality of sleep and waking.