

INSOMNIA

Insomnia is a sleep disorder that results from a variety of causes, both physical and psychological. The most common causes include depression, stress, heart and lung diseases, thyroid gland abnormalities, alcohol abuse, limited exercise, use of stimulants like caffeine, irregular sleep schedules, and side effects from certain medications. Insomnia can affect anyone but it is seen more frequently in the elderly.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Inability to fall asleep or remain sleeping
- Awakening periodically during the night
- Falling asleep at work or at school
- Alternating between too much sleep and not enough sleep

What *your* doctor can do:

- Perform a physical exam; review your medical history and current medications to identify causes; rule out certain diseases or conditions; and order lab tests like thyroid function tests.
- Order other diagnostic exams such as a sleep study and an *electroencephalogram* (EEG, a noninvasive, painless test to record brain activity).
- Recommend counseling for psychological factors.
- Prescribe brief periods of anti-depressants or sleep aids for severe conditions.

What *you* can do:

- Establish a specific "sleep time".
- Designate your bedroom as a "sleeping only" area (do not read, watch TV, etc.).
- Avoid alcoholic beverages and long-term use of sleep aids.
- Take a warm bath to relax prior to going to bed.
- Talk with your doctor about starting an exercise program.
- Consider using other aids such as an electric blanket, earplugs, or an eye mask.
- Try a glass of warm milk and avoid *caffeine* (e.g., coffee, colas, and caffeinated teas).
- Perform relaxation techniques such as yoga, or listening to music or relaxation tapes.
- Consult with your doctor about tips to minimize the side effects of your medications.
- Avoid using over-the-counter sleep aids without consulting with your doctor first.
- Avoid using any sleep aid with alcoholic beverages. This could affect your ability to breathe normally.

Contact your doctor if you develop insomnia or if it continues despite self-treatment and medical treatment.