

What can you do about it?

Identifying the cause of chronic insomnia may require a visit to your physician or to a center that specializes in treating sleep disorders. Before you call the medical cavalry, specialists advise trying these tactics:

1. Set a regular time to go to bed and a regular time to wake up.
2. Engage in regular, moderate exercise during the day. DO NOT exercise vigorously in the evening.
3. In general, avoid daytime naps.
4. Have a light snack or beverage before bedtime if hungry.
5. Make the bedroom as comfortable and secure as possible.
6. Use the bedroom only for activities associated with sleep.
7. If not asleep within 30 minutes, move to another room and engage in a relaxing, quiet activity.
8. Sleep only as much as needed to feel refreshed and alert during the day.
9. Avoid or minimize stimulants, such as coffee, soft drinks, diet pills, alcohol and tobacco.

Try each of the above suggestions for at least one week before discarding it. If necessary, seek medical help.

Available resources

Campus Health
Kirkwood Community College
6301 Kirkwood Blvd. SW
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

(319) 398-5588
Health Resource Directory: <http://www.kirkwood.edu/campushealth/>

Kirkwood Community College Counselors are available for help in this area.
Call (319) 398-5471 for an appointment.

Sleep Disorders Clinic
University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
200 Hawkins Drive
Iowa City, IA 52242
(319) 356-3813 or
(800) 777-8442

Happy Dreaming!

This handout is part of a Self-Help Information Series written by Kirkwood Community College Counselors, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. 319-398-5471 or 1-800-332-2055. ext.5471.

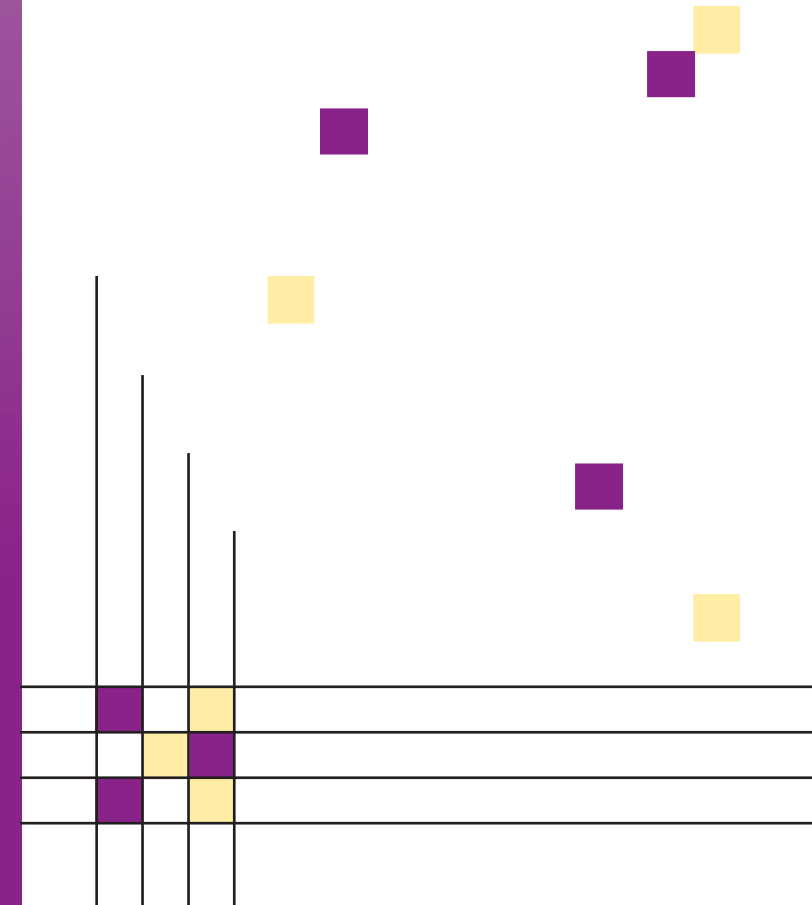
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8/06

Insomnia



Are you lacking a good night's sleep?

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Insomnia is defined as the inability to initiate or maintain sleep. If you frequently find yourself staring at the bedroom ceiling at 3 a.m., you are not alone. Insomnia is a problem that 98% of all adults have experienced at least once in their lives. Here is everything you need to know to unlock the gates to dreamland.

First of all, how serious is your sleeping problem? Sleep research specialists commonly sort insomnia into one of three types: transient, short-term, or chronic.

Transient insomnia takes in occasional episodes of insomnia among normal sleepers, who may clock a restless night because of jet lag, a fight with the boss or significant other, a new romance, test anxiety, or even exciting prospects. Within a short time this cures itself usually only lasting for a few nights.

Short-term insomnia, which may last up to a few weeks, generally arises from temporary stressful situations. It is usually associated with something like the death of a loved one, job loss, or failing in school.

Chronic insomnia, by comparison, may go on for months or years, sometimes with no obvious explanation. Often it can be a symptom of an underlying psychiatric problem, such as persistent depression. It also occurs in association with chronic use of sleep medication, excessive alcohol intake, disturbances in work schedules, and disorders involving repetitive or "restless" leg movements. Intensive investigation is sometimes necessary to identify the underlying problem and solve it.

Why do people develop insomnia?

Most researchers agree it arises from a tangled interplay of factors. Rita, who developed bad sleep habits during a period of high stress, also has intermittent pain from an old jogging injury. Robert, a returning student, has erratic work hours on the evening and night shift and consequently an irregular sleep schedule. Sue, who has also started taking classes, has a new baby in the house and has trouble falling asleep when she has the opportunity. College life can create and/or increase a tendency toward insomnia through irregular sleeping hours, such as "sleeping in" on weekends, "all nighters", increased stress, test and performance anxiety and excessive partying and alcohol intake.

Five factors can contribute to insomnia:

1. Stress

Social, emotional and physical stress can have a major impact on a person's sleeplessness. This is a very common cause of short-term insomnia that could lead to long-term insomnia if it is not taken seriously and treated.

2. Medical Problems

These include physical pain from arthritis, ulcers, angina, migraines; breathing disorders such as asthma, sleep apnea, irregular heartbeat, some kidney and thyroid problems, pregnancy, menopause and restless leg-jerks. The natural process of aging with diminished sleep efficiency can also contribute.

Why do people develop insomnia? cont'd

3. Drugs

The sleep disturbing effects of alcohol and many other drugs are well documented. In a national study of 5,000 patients, drug and alcohol dependency was named as the primary cause in 12 percent of patients with chronic insomnia. Many types of drugs can lead to insomnia - stimulants, sedatives, depressants, as well as certain thyroid drugs, contraceptives and heart medications.

4. Poor Sleep Habits

For many people, disturbing environments or bad habits can profoundly affect sleep. A bedroom that is too noisy, too light, too hot or cold, can keep you awake. So can a digestive tract rumbling from too little or too much food, exercise too close to bedtime, or even heart palpitations from chocolate, cheddar cheese or other foods high in tyrosine. Irregular bedtimes and waking times also throw off the sleep mechanism.

5. Negative Conditioning

Fear of insomnia can become its own self-fulfilling prophecy. After enough interminable nights of staring at the ceiling, rituals such as brushing teeth or donning pajamas, can become stimuli for tension rather than for relaxation. People can become so desperate for a good night's sleep that they try too hard.