

Newcastle Regional Sleep Service

Insomnia

Introduction

Insomnia is one of the most common problems associated with sleep. It is a common sleep disorder. People who have insomnia have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or both. As a result, they may get too little sleep or have poor-quality sleep. They may not feel refreshed when they wake up. Many people suffer from insomnia at some time during their lives. It may be short lived and easily explained by current circumstances or events, or it may be a long-term problem that has gone on for many years. This leaflet contains some suggestions that you can try if you have trouble getting to sleep.

How much sleep do we need?

The amount of sleep we require varies from person to person. Although the average adult sleeps 7-8 hours, there are many people who easily get by on much less than this and others who sleep for longer. Our sleep requirement also changes as we get older. People tend to sleep less and have more awakenings during the night as we get older. These changes are quite normal. A shorter period of good, deep sleep is more refreshing than a longer time spent in bed if much of it is spent in light, restless sleep.

Many people worry about the effects of sleep loss. Most of us know that if we have a bad night our concentration is poorer the following day and we may feel sleepy and irritable. Whilst this is unsatisfactory, it will not do your health any harm and on following nights your body will make up for it with extra sleep.

What can I do to reduce my insomnia?

Listed below are some general points about things that affect sleep.

Bedroom environment

The best sleeping environment is one that is dark, quiet and a comfortable temperature. If there are things you can do to minimise outside noise, this may help.

Food and drink

Hunger disturbs sleep, so a light snack or a warm drink before bed may be a good idea. Caffeine is a stimulant that remains in the blood circulation for up to six hours after it has been taken. It is therefore best to avoid drinking coffee, tea and other drinks containing caffeine, such as cola (certainly from lunchtime onwards) and to try decaffeinated versions. Alcohol helps some people fall asleep but causes rebound awakenings later on in the night

when the level of alcohol in the blood falls, so is better avoided or at least limited to before 6 pm.

Smoking

Nicotine is a stimulant and has similar effects to caffeine so stopping smoking may help. Advice on stopping smoking can be obtained from a member of the sleep team, your local GP's surgery, community venues, pharmacies and workplaces.

Exercise

Regular light exercise as part of a daytime or **early** evening routine is recommended, but should not be taken within three hours of bed time as it also produces substances in the body (e.g. adrenaline) which act as stimulants.

Relaxation

Make time to relax at the end of the day, don't go to bed thinking about the day's events or planning activities for the next day. Before going to bed do things that help you switch off and prepare you for sleep. If you know that you have a problem unwinding at the end of the day, relaxation exercises may help. There are many good relaxation tapes available which may be useful to try. Having a notepad and pencil by the bed allows you to write down things that come to mind that you need to remember to do. This allows you to dismiss them from your memory, safe in the knowledge that you will be reminded of them the next day when you look at the pad.

Routine

It is important to establish a regular sleeping and waking routine. If you suffer from insomnia, the normal sleep/wake cycle may be disrupted in a number of ways. For instance; sleeping later in the mornings to make up for a bad night, going to bed earlier in the hope of getting to sleep earlier or taking a nap during the day to catch up on lost sleep.

Unfortunately, all these strategies only disrupt the sleep cycle further and worsen sleep. In order to re-establish a routine, use an alarm clock to ensure that you wake up at the same time each morning and keep to this time during the week and at week-ends, **even if you have a bad night**. You should get up as soon as the alarm goes off and never be tempted to lie in bed dozing, otherwise your body expects to be able to do the same the next night and it just gets harder and harder to get up. In addition, avoid daytime naps as these break up your sleep and contribute to the insomnia at night. These steps will help your body to establish a sleep routine.

Sleep clinic input

We have a consultant, who is interested in seeing people with insomnia who have not responded to simple measures. She will often ask people to keep sleep diaries about their sleep patterns, and then gives advice on sleeping strategies accordingly. If you think it would be helpful to be referred to her in the clinic, speak to either your GP or your sleep consultant.

Cognitive behavioural therapy

This can be very helpful and is often as effective as medication but with fewer side effects and has a long lasting effect. We offer both online treatment options and face to face treatment courses within the NHS sleep service via Dr Anderson, Consultant Neurologist.

There is also immediate access, commercial versions of the treatment programme; www.sleepstation.org.uk (£99 per course of therapy) but these do include careful initial screening to make sure it is the best treatment option for your sleep problem. Colin Espie has also written a useful self-help guide guide: 'Overcoming insomnia and sleep problems', published by Constable and Robinson Ltd.

For further information

Contact details

If you have any further concerns or questions, please contact
Regional Sleep Service
Freeman Hospital
High Heaton
NE7 7DN
Tel: 0191 2336161
Fax: 0191 213 7087

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02 or e-mail northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Useful websites

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk. On this website there is an information prescription generator www.nhs.uk/ips which brings together a wealth of approved patient information from the NHS and charity partners which you may find helpful

**This leaflet is available in alternative formats on request
by telephoning 0191 2137219**

Produced by Dr Sophie West, Respiratory Consultant and Dr Kirstie Anderson, Consultant Neurologist
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