

Tips for Reducing Insomnia

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While almost everyone occasionally has a night of poor sleep, chronic insomnia and poor sleep are epidemic today. The American Sleep Association reports that over one-third of American adults report falling asleep unintentionally during the day in the past month, and nearly 5% admit to dozing off while driving at least once a month. Poor sleep is indicated in depression, anxiety, poor work and school performance, and multiple other health problems. On the flip side, depression, anxiety and stressful work or school situations can interfere with good sleep. Research now indicates that long periods of inadequate sleep can contribute to dementia, providing one more great reason to work towards regularly having the right amount, and good quality, sleep! Don't try to "get by" on as little sleep as possible; find the "just right" amount for you and treat it like air: we absolutely must have it!

Some people need to consult a professional for problems with sleep; they may have sleep apnea or severe insomnia patterns that necessitate a detailed and personalized plan. For many people, however, simple strategies improve their quality of sleep. The following tips are for information, and not intended as medical or professional guidance. Please see your licensed health professional if insomnia is a problem for you.

For transient, short-term sleep problems, here are possible strategies:

1. Keep regular hours all week. Changing your rising times and bedtimes will impact the quality of sleep and the ease with which you fall asleep.
2. Get outdoors in the morning. Bright, natural light early in the day helps set the body's clock for a normal sleep schedule.
3. In the evening, lower the lights and use warm light. Avoid excessively bright light at night; it tricks the brain into thinking it's "awake time."
4. Avoid screens for two hours before bedtime. While the research on blue light, and blue light blockers, is ongoing, most screen activities are also very stimulating and will result in heightened alertness. Choose other quiet activities that narrow your focus and are calming. If you use an e-reader, use a comfortable but not glaringly bright setting.
5. Avoid caffeine for at least six hours before you intend to go to bed.
6. Begin a habit of keeping a gratitude journal just before retiring for the night. Besides helping relax and change your mindset to appreciation, research indicates it can also reduce depression. Focusing on listing five or ten blessings of the day lifts our hearts and minds to God. This can be part of your evening prayer routine.

If simple interventions don't improve your sleep, keep a record of the difficulties you have with sleep and consult a professional. Make note of important details such as your bedtime and rising times for a few weeks, how long it takes to fall asleep, how often you wake in the night

and for how long, and what you have tried to improve your sleep. If you worry about sleep, make note of that, too. The information you provide will be important clues to the approach to insomnia that best helps you.