

Insomnia

Sleep is a complex activity that is vital to your mental, physical and emotional health. During the deepest stages of sleep the body is able to restore organs, bones and tissue; replenish immune cells and circulate a rejuvenating supply of hormones and chemicals making the body less vulnerable to diseases.

Insomnia is defined as having difficulty falling asleep or frequent or early awakening. It is often caused by lifestyle, stress, inability to relax, lack of exercise, poor dietary or sleeping habits, side effects of recreational, prescription and non-prescription drugs or a physical illness.

Mind-Body Connection

- 🧘 An over active mind, worry, anxiety, distress, depression or unresolved anger is often the root of short term insomnia.
- 🧘 Schedule worry time during the day. Writing down your thoughts or feelings often will break the vicious cycle.
- 🧘 Exercise, meditate, do yoga or creative visualization to calm your mind.

Lifestyle

- 🧘 A regular schedule improves sleep. Go to bed and rise at the same time, even on weekends and holidays.
- 🧘 Stay awake throughout the day, if you do nap keep it less than one hour in length.
- 🧘 Fluorescent lights decrease the hormone melatonin which is necessary for sleeping. Change to full spectrum lights, better still spend more time outside.
- 🧘 If you work night shift, keep to a regular schedule and sleep in a blacked-out room.
- 🧘 Smoking causes the mind to be more active and can prevent sleep.

Exercise

- 🧘 Exercise on a daily basis to relieve the tension from a hectic day and to assist relaxation of the muscles and mind.
- 🧘 Avoid strenuous exercise in the evening as it may keep you up.
- 🧘 Outdoor exercise is better for reducing stress.
- 🧘 Do gentle stretching before getting into or out of bed.
- 🧘 To relax the body, take deep, slow breathes with a prolonged exhalation. Another way of relaxing, is to progressively tighten and then relax every muscle in the body starting with your toes and working up to your neck.



Nutrition

- 🕯 Starchy foods before bedtime tend to raise the level of serotonin in the brain. This often has a sedating effect. Eat a small portion of pasta, half a baked potato, apple or a piece of toast half an hour before bed.
- 🕯 Stimulants are the worst offenders. After 11 a.m. eliminate coffee, tea, cola, chocolate and over the counter medications with caffeine.
- 🕯 Alcohol initially can be sedating, as the night goes on it will lighten and fragment sleep.
- 🕯 Sugar, fruit or a large meal too close to bedtime increases blood sugar and makes it more difficult for the body to relax.
- 🕯 Spicy, fatty or gas-producing foods can cause pain or discomfort that affects sleep.

Bedroom

- 🕯 Keep it cool. A drop in body temperature stimulates sleep.
- 🕯 Keep it comfortable. If you wake up with more back or neck pain than you went to bed with it is probably time to buy a new mattress or pillow.
- 🕯 Keep it quiet. If your room is noisy use ear plugs, white noise, fan or a relaxing CD.
- 🕯 Keep it dark. Melatonin, the main hormone for balancing sleep, needs darkness. Use thick curtains, blinds, or eye masks to ensure maximum darkness.
- 🕯 Keep it work free. Your bedroom is for sleeping. Watching television, working on

a computer and reading can over stimulate the mind and affect sleep.

- 🕯 Keep it peaceful. Use soft, calming colours without a lot of clutter and mess.
- 🕯 Keep it free from distractions. Turn the ringer off the phone, turn your clock away from view and set the alarm on your radio.

Bedtime Routine

- 🕯 Wind down before bedtime. Do some light reading, quiet conversation, gentle exercise or listen to soft music.
- 🕯 Take a hot bath an hour or two before bed to induce sleep and relax tense muscles.
- 🕯 Go to the washroom right before bed to decrease having to get up during the night.
- 🕯 Wear clothes that are cool, loose fitting, comfortable and allow the skin to breathe.
- 🕯 If you don't fall asleep within half an hour, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy.

Work with your Naturopathic Doctor

- 🕯 to determine the root cause of your insomnia.
- 🕯 to identify any triggers that may be contributing and to treat underlying physical ailments.
- 🕯 to identify specific naturopathic treatments that can support you in addressing your insomnia.