

Insomnia

At any one time, around a third of the population has trouble sleeping. While the occasional sleepless night won't affect you long-term, true insomnia – sleeplessness that lasts three or four nights a week for more than a month – can really have an impact on your daily life.

As an insomniac you may wake in the middle of the night and have trouble getting back to sleep, or you might find it difficult to fall asleep in the first place. Insomnia can be a temporary, occasional or chronic problem.

Unsurprisingly, worry and stress are usually top of the list when it comes to causes. It can be very hard to fall asleep with worries racing around your head, and underlying stress can wake you up long before morning comes. Other factors that can keep you awake include too much noise, your partner snoring, caffeinated drinks, too much alcohol and being too hot or cold.

Supplement help:

One of these readily available supplements may be exactly what you need to send you to sleep. L-tryptophan and serotonin 5-HTP:

L-tryptophan, an amino acid, has been used successfully for people with insomnia. When in the body, it converts itself into serotonin and then melatonin – a hormone that regulates sleep. A similar compound called 5-HTP is available over the counter. Taking around 50 to 100mg of 5-HTP an hour before bed may improve sleep quality. Magnesium:

Magnesium supplements may help your insomnia if you have a problem with involuntary limb movement, such as restless leg syndrome (RLS). In a preliminary trial, people with RLS who suffered from insomnia showed significant improvements in sleep quality after taking the supplements. Try taking 250mg magnesium each evening. Herbal help:

There are several, traditionally used, herbal remedies available to help relieve insomnia. Best of all, they work without any nasty side effects. Valerian:

Valerian is the leading herb for insomnia in modern herbal medicine. It makes getting to sleep easier and also increases deep sleep and dreaming. Unlike prescription drugs, valerian rarely causes a morning hangover effect. The recommended dose is one or two 450mg capsules of dried root or alternatively, 1ml of liquid extract mixed with water. Chamomile, hops, passiflora and lemon balm:

Chamomile, hops, passiflora and lemon balm, all mild sedative herbs, can be used to relieve insomnia or nervous exhaustion. Herbalists also often combine them with valerian to help beat sleeping problems. If you have children whose insomnia is caused by a stomach upset, chamomile is particularly effective.

Diet and Lifestyle:

Paying extra attention to how and what you eat, as well as learning how to relax, can really work wonders for improving insomnia.

Before going to bed try to ensure you've left a minimum of two hours since last eating to allow your food to digest properly. Otherwise your gut, which also needs to rest, will be active throughout the night. If hunger is keeping you awake, eat a banana or have a milky drink. Both can boost levels of serotonin, which helps promote sleep.

If you're sensitive to the effects of caffeine, you should avoid it from lunchtime onwards. But because the effects can last for up to 20 hours, some people have disturbed sleep patterns even when their last cup of coffee was in the morning. Remember that black tea, green tea, cocoa, chocolate, some soft drinks and a number of over the counter medicines also contain caffeine.

Smoking

Smokers are more likely to have insomnia. This is because nicotine is a stimulant. Giving up will, of course, do loads for your general health.

Many experts recommend exercise as a way to beat insomnia. It can be very effective at reducing stress levels and tire you out physically. Try to do at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five times each week, such as brisk walking, jogging or aerobics.

You should develop pre-sleep habits as these can be really helpful in regulating your slumber. After a few days of sticking to the routine, your sleep patterns should return to normal. Also, don't use your bed for any activity other

than sleep and sex. This will help you automatically associate your bed with these things.

Try to wind down for at least 30 minutes before bed. Read a book to help ease the transition into sleep. Try writing your worries down and tell yourself that you will deal with them in the morning. Supplements and herbs mentioned in this article are available to buy online now:

Seratone 5-HTP

Magnesium

Valerian

Valerian, Hops & Lemon balm