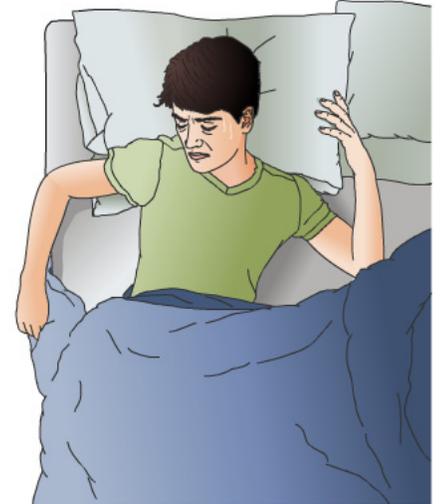


Introduction

Insomnia is a disorder that can make it hard to go to sleep or stay asleep. Most adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Insomnia makes it hard to get the right amount of sleep. About 1 out of 10 people may have insomnia. Insomnia can cause sleepiness and a lack of energy during the day. It can affect your mood and can make it hard to focus on tasks. Long-term insomnia may lead to health problems such as weight gain and high blood pressure.

This reference summary explains insomnia. It talks about the symptoms and causes of the disorder. It also discusses how insomnia is diagnosed and treated.



Sleep and Insomnia

Sleep is important for good health. Getting enough sleep helps us learn, fight disease and avoid stress. Most adults need about 8 hours of sleep per night. Lack of sleep can cause problems with work, driving and social activities. It can also lead to health problems including obesity, diabetes and heart problems.

People with insomnia have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or both. People with insomnia may become irritable and sleepy. They may develop headaches and have abdominal pain. Insomnia also can cause problems with concentration, memory and reaction time. This can make it dangerous to drive vehicles.

Symptoms

If you have insomnia, you may lie awake for a long time before you fall asleep. You may sleep for short periods and spend much of the night awake. You may wake up earlier than you want to.

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Insomnia may decrease your quality of life. It can cause:

- Anxiety.
- Concentration problems.
- Headaches.
- Sleepiness during the day.

Insomnia also can make it hard to remember things. It may make it dangerous to drive because of daytime sleepiness.

Causes

The cause of insomnia is not always known. But some commonly abused substances can cause insomnia. These include caffeine, tobacco and alcohol. Stress can also cause insomnia. Stress can be caused by major life changes such as divorce or moving to a new town. It can also result from being emotionally upset. Traveling and changing time zones can also cause insomnia. Work schedules that disrupt your sleep routine may cause insomnia.



Insomnia can also be caused by certain medical, neurological or psychological problems. Psychological problems that can cause insomnia include:

- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

PTSD is a type of anxiety disorder. It can happen after extreme emotional trauma. PTSD can cause flashbacks and feelings of detachment.

Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease are examples of neurological disorders that can cause insomnia. Alzheimer's disease causes a loss of brain function that gets worse over time. It affects memory, thinking and behavior. Parkinson's disease is a disorder that causes tremors and problems with movement.

Other medical disorders that can cause insomnia include:

- Asthma or other breathing disorders.
- Chronic pain conditions, such as arthritis.
- Heart failure.
- Heartburn.
- Stroke.

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Some medications may make it hard to sleep at night. Many asthma and allergy medications can cause insomnia. Anyone can have insomnia. But it is more common in women than men. People over the age of 60 are more likely to have insomnia.

Diagnosis

Your health care provider will perform a physical exam. He or she will ask about your personal and family medical history. Your health care provider will ask you about your patterns of sleep. He or she may ask you to keep a sleep diary for a week or more.

A sleep diary can help you keep track of:

- When you go to bed.
- How long it takes you to fall asleep.
- How many times you wake up and stay awake at night.
- How long you sleep each night.



Your health care provider may recommend a sleep study. This test is also called a polysomnogram. The test takes place in an overnight sleep lab.

During a sleep study, sensors are placed on different parts of your body. They will record your:

- Blood oxygen level.
- Brain waves.
- Breathing.
- Eye movements.

The sensors will also record your:

- Heartbeat.
- Limb movements.
- Muscle tension.



Your sleep will be recorded by a video camera as well. Based on the results of your sleep study, your health care provider may be able to help you find out the cause of your insomnia.

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Treatment

Insomnia is usually treated with lifestyle changes, counseling, medications or a combination of these treatments. Avoid substances that may cause insomnia. Limit your intake of caffeine and tobacco. Alcohol may seem like it makes it easier to fall asleep. But it often triggers sleep that is lighter than normal. This means that it is more likely that you will wake up during the middle of the night.



Relaxing before bed may make it easier to fall asleep. Taking a hot bath or reading a book at night may also make sleeping easier. Avoid bright lights before going to bed. Turn off electronics, including your television, computer and cell phone an hour before you try to fall asleep. Go to sleep around the same time each night. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule can make it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Therapy is also used to treat insomnia. The most common therapy used for insomnia is called cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT.

CBT can help you:

- Focus on your feelings, thoughts, moods and behaviors.
- Identify certain thought patterns that may cause restlessness.
- Learn relaxation techniques that can help you sleep at night.



Insomnia is sometimes treated with prescription medication. These medications can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep during the night. Sleep medications may make you feel groggy. In rare cases, they can cause you to eat, walk or drive while asleep. Sleep medications may be habit-forming. Talk to your health care provider to see if sleep medications are right for you.

Prevention

Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Daily exercise can help sleep patterns. But do not exercise late in the day. Try to exercise no later than 5 or 6 hours before your bedtime.

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Avoid substances that may make it hard to fall asleep such as caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Avoid large meals and beverages late at night. Eating before bed can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep. Talk to your health care provider about any medications that may disrupt your sleep. Do not stop taking any medication before talking to your health care provider.

Do not take late naps. Naps can help make up for lost sleep. But late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night. Keep a comfortable sleeping environment. Get rid of anything that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed or warm temperatures.



Summary

Insomnia is a disorder that can make it hard to fall asleep or to stay asleep. Most adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Insomnia makes it hard to get the right amount of sleep. If you have insomnia, you may lie awake for a long time before you fall asleep. You may sleep for short periods and spend much of the night awake. You may wake up earlier than you want to.

Insomnia may cause:

- Anxiety.
- Concentration problems.
- Headaches.
- Sleepiness during the day.

Insomnia also can make it hard to remember things. It may make it dangerous to drive because of daytime sleepiness.



Insomnia may be caused by food or stress. It can also be caused by other medical problems or medications. But insomnia does not always have a known cause. Insomnia is usually treated with lifestyle changes, counseling, medications or a combination of these treatments.

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