

Sleep Easy

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"I can't sleep!" Those three words can spell nights of restless torment for those who suffer from insomnia. For most of us, an occasional night without much sleep is no big deal, but when it persists night after night, a vicious cycle can begin that can be exhausting and extremely frustrating. The desperation for a good night's sleep can be enormous.

Sleep is Essential

Sleep is very necessary to the well-being of mind and body. Most people spend close to 30% of their time either sleeping or trying to. Not only does sleep provide needed time for rest and repair of your body, but your mind needs sleep as well, in order to process the events and stresses of the previous day and to dream. If people are deprived of sleep and dreams for too long, they will start to dream while awake or fall into a state where they sleep for a few seconds or minutes in a kind of cat nap. Extreme sleep deprivation can lead to a form of psychosis, with delusions and hallucinations. Fortunately, most people don't ever get to that point.

How Insomnia Occurs

Pain, stress, worry, anxiety and panic, illness, the side effects of drugs, uncomfortable or strange surroundings, noise, travel, and the disruption of your normal rhythms and cycles can all play a part in insomnia. Insomnia may take several forms. Some people have difficulty falling asleep, some wake in the middle of the night and others wake too early, after having had too little of their well-deserved rest. Other people have dreams and nightmares which disturb their sleep. Sleep comes because your brain begins to filter out incoming stimuli and gradually shifts your attention from outer to inner awareness. Your body awareness becomes less and quickly, or gradually, you fall asleep. When your mental activity, pain, emotional state, noise and discomfort keep your attention above the sleep threshold, you don't sleep. The biochemicals and the hormones that the body produces in an aroused, excited or fearful state work directly against the process needed for going to sleep. In going to sleep, the parasympathetic or calming aspect of the nervous system comes into play, while when you are stressed or excited the sympathetic nervous system is activated, causing you to stay awake, ready for fight or flight. In order to go to sleep, you have to shift to the parasympathetic, relax, breathe deeply and let your mind move into feelings and images, rather than verbal thought.

How to Sleep Like a Baby

Is there anything you can do about insomnia? Natural medicine has a lot to offer to the insomniac. Most of the ways to fight insomnia involve helping the brain and body to relax and slow down and to shift your awareness to a more

internal focus. Herb that have sedative qualities mimic the brain's own system for going to sleep by altering neuro-transmitters and stimulating the natural opiates produced by the brain. Homeopathic medicines restore the natural sleep rhythms and balance, and heal emotional states which prevent sleep. Here are some of the most effective herbal and homeopathic sleep aids

Herbal Sleeping Potions

The herbal medicines for sleeping calm the nerves and help induce drowsiness and relaxation. The most common of these is chamomile tea, which acts as a mild sedative and a cup before bed can soothe jangled nerves. The most potent of the herbal sedatives is valerian root, which by itself can often induce sleep if given in sufficient doses. Valerian can be given as a boiled decoction of the root, in capsules, tincture or solid extract. Taking too much can make you nauseous. Passion flower is a very good nervine for decreasing the anxiety which interferes with sleep. It is usually combined with skullcap and hops to make an effective anti-insomnia formula. Calms Forte' uses a similar formula in tablet form and has proved effective for mild cases of insomnia.

Homeopathic Remedies

The remedies are made from substances in nature like coffee, strychnine and arsenic that cause wakefulness in healthy people. When prepared in minute, potentized doses, and prescribed according to the principle of like cures like, they can cure insomnia. When treating chronic insomnia, we have found it best to treat the whole person homeopathically, rather than just the specific symptom of sleeplessness. These are the most commonly used remedies and their indications:

Arsenicum album- sleeplessness from worry and anxiety (especially about one's health) with a fear of dying. Wakefulness after midnight, especially 1-2 A.M. Restless, gets out of bed.

Nux vomica- insomnia from worries about business, too much stress, in a competitive, aggressive person. Wakes at 3 A.M and can't get back to sleep. Exhausted from overwork.

Coffea cruda- wide eyed at 3 A.M. with overactive mind, excessive joy, feeling exited

Cocculus- sleeplessness from nursing the sick. With motion sickness, anxiety and nausea.

Chamomilla- sleeplessness from pain, nightmares, teething. Irritable, whiny, and restless.

Hypnosis, Meditation and Relaxation

Exploring the causes of the insomnia through hypnosis often sheds light on the problem. Many tapes are available which give a hypnotic induction and effective suggestions for sleep. Relaxation exercises and meditation are also excellent ways to prepare for sleep. Consciously relax your body as you prepare for sleep. Go through your body from head to toe, breathing deeply and relaxing all the muscles. Remember the feeling of going to sleep, and feel your eyes and body become warm and heavy as you relax. Some people enjoy soaking in a relaxing hot bath before bed, or having a cup of warm milk (which contains tryptophan, a sleep-inducing amino acid.)

Preparing for Sleep

Make your bedroom a peaceful sanctuary. Reserve your bed for sleeping, so that it isn't associated with waking activities. Pick a bedtime for yourself. Gradually decrease your activity level and stimulation as you prepare to go to bed. Make your surroundings soothing and comfortable, dim and quiet.

Often the time just before sleep is when your subconscious mind likes to present you with the unfinished business of the day or your life, including all your worries and anxieties. Review your day and make plans and resolutions for the coming day, so that you know what you need to attend to and your mind can be at rest about it. Forgive yourself and others, let go of what you are holding on to and accept that there is nothing else that you can change or do today. Face your fears, including the fear of not sleeping. Accept your imperfections and look forward to tomorrow as a time for making changes and completing what was left undone today. Affirm to yourself that all is well. Feel the safety and protection that comes from your connection to God and the universe. Feel that you deserve to rest and sleep, no matter what you did or didn't do today. Keep letting go--of the day, of your tension, of your body, of your worries. Sleep is surrender-- to the tiredness, the struggle, the fear, the possibility that you might not wake up again. Keep surrendering and letting the mind dissolve, until sleep comes. Sleep easy.

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