

# UNDERSTANDING *insomnia*

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The American Academy  
of Sleep Medicine  
[www.aasmnet.org](http://www.aasmnet.org)

# HAVING TROUBLE *sleeping?*

## **DO YOU . . .**

**Wake up during the night and find that you can't go back to sleep?**

**Lie in bed, tossing and turning for hours a night?**

**Dread going to bed because you feel like you never get a good night's sleep?**

If you have answered "yes" to any of the above questions, then you may have insomnia.



# LEARN ABOUT INSOMNIA

## WHAT IS INSOMNIA?

Insomnia is a sleep disorder that occurs when you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

## WHO IS AT RISK FOR INSOMNIA?

Anyone may have insomnia, but it is more common in some groups, such as:

- Older adults
- Women
- People under stress
- People with certain medical and mental health problems

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***Studies show that insomnia negatively affects work performance.***

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## **WHAT CAUSES INSOMNIA?**

Some sleep disorders can cause insomnia or make it worse.

**OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA:** Obstructive Sleep Apnea, or OSA, is a common sleep disorder. If you have OSA, it means that your airway collapses part or all of the way while you are sleeping. When your airway collapses, air can't get through and you often wake up. Many times, you don't remember waking up and fall back asleep. However, you may also wake up and be unable to fall back asleep. Some people with OSA also have trouble falling asleep at night.

**RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME:** Restless Legs Syndrome, or RLS, happens when you feel like you have to move your legs. You may also feel burning or itching inside your legs. RLS can make it hard for you to go to sleep, and you may be tired the next day.

Speak with your health care provider if you think you have symptoms of OSA or RLS. Insomnia often improves when these sleep disorders are treated.

Other medical problems can also cause insomnia or make it worse.

**DEPRESSION:** Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses in the United States. People with depression often have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

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***Signs of depression include:***

- Lacking interest in or not enjoying activities that usually make you happy
  - Feeling like you have no energy and are worn out
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**PAIN:** People who experience chronic pain from another medical problem, like arthritis or cancer, can have trouble sleeping.

## **HOW IS INSOMNIA TREATED?**

**MEDICATION:** Medication can be used to treat insomnia. Prescription or over-the-counter medication can help you fall or stay asleep.

Speak to your health care provider about any sleeping pills you have been prescribed or purchased over the counter. Modern sleeping pills provide safe and effective treatment for insomnia. However, many sleeping pills are not meant to be used long term and might have negative side effects. Your health care provider can help if you want to stop using a sleeping pill safely.

**COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY FOR INSOMNIA (CBT-I):** Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, or CBT-I, is a non-medication treatment for insomnia. CBT-I addresses the thoughts and behaviors that keep you from sleeping well and helps you learn new strategies to sleep better.

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***CBT-I can include techniques for:***

- Stress reduction
- Relaxation
- Sleep schedule management

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Many people combine medication and CBT-I. Although insomnia is common, most people can find a treatment that works for them.

## **TIPS TO HELP WITH INSOMNIA**

**AVOID CAFFEINE:** Caffeine stimulates the brain and interferes with sleep. Regular use during the day can lead to sleep problems at night. If you are having trouble falling asleep, you should not drink more than 200 milligrams of caffeine a day, about the amount in 2 cups of coffee. Do not have any caffeine after lunch.

**TURN OFF ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** The artificial light generated by a laptop, tablet, or cell phone screen can interfere with your body's sleepiness cues. Turn off all electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

**MAKE A COZY SLEEPING ENVIRONMENT:** Keep your bedroom dark. You may want to put up blackout curtains or use an eye mask. Try to keep your bedroom temperature comfortable. Most people prefer a bedroom around 68°F, but lower or raise the temperature as you feel necessary.

**If your symptoms don't go away after trying these tips, your health care provider can help you find the treatment that is right for you.**

For more information, see [www.sleepcentral.org](http://www.sleepcentral.org)

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