

# WHAT IS INSOMNIA?

## Quick Facts:

Insomnia is a persistent sleep problem that occurs even though you have the opportunity to get a full night of sleep. Common insomnia complaints include:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep during the night
- Waking up earlier than desired

## KEY POINTS:

- **Insomnia is one of the most common sleep problems.**
- **Brief insomnia symptoms occur in 30 to 35% of people.**
- **About 15 to 20% of people have a short-term insomnia disorder.**
- **Chronic insomnia disorder occurs in about 10% of people.**
- **Insomnia can be treated effectively.**



## How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit [www.sleepeducation.org](http://www.sleepeducation.org)

## Am I At Risk:

Common causes of insomnia include stress, pain, depression, anxiety and other sleep disorders. Insomnia also can result from bad sleep habits such as daytime napping or using electronic devices in bed. Medications can cause insomnia as a side-effect. Substances such as caffeine, alcohol and tobacco also can disrupt your sleep.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW:

People who have insomnia struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep. The negative effects of insomnia include fatigue, lack of energy and moodiness. You may have trouble concentrating at school or work. You also may feel concerned or frustrated about your sleep. There are two types of insomnia. They are defined by how long you have had the problem:

Short-term insomnia disorder involves a sleep disturbance that has been present for less than 3 months. It may last for days or weeks, and it is often linked to brief stress.

Chronic insomnia disorder occurs at least 3 times per week for at least 3 months. It often occurs with other health problems, such as depression, chronic pain, heart failure or chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders.

To diagnose insomnia, your doctor will talk to you about your sleep habits and medical history. You also may need to complete questionnaires or keep a sleep diary. A sleep study is not needed to diagnose insomnia.

## TREATMENTS:

Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is the most effective, long-term treatment for chronic insomnia. CBT-I teaches you to change negative thoughts and attitudes about sleep. You also develop relaxation skills and learn how to change behaviors that interfere with sleep.

Sleeping pills are a short-term treatment option for insomnia. Like all medications, these drugs can cause a variety of side-effects. You should take a sleeping pill only when supervised by a doctor.

Treatment for insomnia also may involve treating an underlying medical problem, such as chronic pain. Changing medications or getting help from a counselor may improve your sleep.

Over-the-counter “sleep aids” are not recommended for the treatment of chronic insomnia. These include anti-histamines and herbal supplements. There has not been enough research to show that they are safe and effective.

## TIPS:

Good sleep habits can help you sleep better. Tips to help you reduce symptoms of insomnia include:

- **Go to bed when you feel sleepy and wake up at the same time each day.**
- **Avoid daytime naps.**
- **Obtain and maintain a healthy body weight.**
- **Exercise each day at a pace that feels comfortable.**
- **Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening and alcohol before bedtime.**
- **Turn off any electronics at least an hour before bed.**
- **Follow a soothing bedtime routine that helps you relax.**
- **Set aside a period of time each day to think about any concerns or worries.**

## ➔ Next Steps:

- Talk to your doctor about any ongoing sleep problems.
- Your doctor will help find and treat any underlying causes of your insomnia.
- Discuss all of your medications and herbal supplements with your doctor. Ask about the sleep-related side effects of your medications. Your doctor may adjust your medication timing and dose to help improve your sleep.
- Your doctor may give you questionnaires or a sleep diary to complete.



### Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your doctor.

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### Sample Questions:

Why do I feel tired all the time?

What is a CPAP machine and how can it help me?