



Insomnia



Insomnia means you regularly have trouble sleeping. Most people experience insomnia at some point in their life. It can be acute (e.g. sleep problems related to a particularly stressful event) or chronic (difficulty to fall and stay asleep over weeks, months, and sometimes years).

The brain and body need sleep to function properly, so insomnia can make a person more vulnerable towards physical and mental health problems. A healthy, restful sleep on the other hand can be key towards physical and psychological wellbeing.

Insomnia affects people in different ways and there is no one-size-fits-all approach or magical cure. We have gathered some information on what seemed to have helped people in the past. You may need to try a few of these suggestions before you arrive at one that works for you.

Sleep hygiene

- Try to go to bed and wake up at approx. the same time every day
- Try not to nap during the day
- Only go to bed when you feel tired
- Avoid stressful or exciting situations at least 1 hour before you go to bed
- Switch off all electronic devices at least 1 hour before you go to bed – avoid artificial screen light
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and your bed is comfortable. Air the room out before you go to sleep and use earplugs or an eye mask if necessary
- Exercise regularly during the day
- Avoid stimulants (coffee, tea, coca cola, sugar, etc.)
- Try not to eat a big meal before going to bed but you may want to have a warm, non-caffeinated drink
- Try having a warm bath with essential oils before bed
- Write down a list of things you need to remember before you go to bed. That way you don't need to try and remember them during the night

Apps to try

Headspace

- Themed sessions from stress to sleep
- Bite-sized meditations
- SOS exercises in case of sudden meltdowns

Sleepio

- Lifestyle advice
- Cognitive techniques
- Personalized 24 hour schedule option

Calm

- Meditation
- Breathing exercises
- Nature scenes for on the go

See your GP

These are some of the things your GP may suggest:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Blood tests to check whether the issue has a physical root
- Medications (treat with care: many of these have side effects or cause addiction)
- A referral to a sleep clinic or a specialist

Other things to try

Breathing exercises, mindfulness or visualisation

These can help slow your thoughts as well as your heart rate down. You may want to listen to relaxing sounds, such as water, rain, etc. You may also try to visualise something relaxing, e.g. decorating an empty house room by room. Also see suggested apps.

Brain detox

Try to clear your diary as much as possible, even if this means saying no to things you may enjoy, such as spending time with friends. In some cases, insomnia may be caused by the brain being overloaded with information – a clear diary or free time may help alleviate that.

Deliberate sleep deprivation

This is a strategy to be used with caution, but some theories suggest that the harder you try to sleep, the less you are able to sleep, hence the vice versa should also work. If you are deliberately trying to stay awake, you may end up finding it easier to fall asleep.

Acupuncture/Acupressure

Praised by some people as a miracle cure for insomnia. Acupressure or Shiatsu massages can help relieve tension and stress.

Supplements

Some supplements are said to aid sleep, e.g. Magnesium, Melatonin, Vitamin D or Valerian root.

Further reading:

<https://beta.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia>