

Just Can't Get to Sleep...

"I lay in bed, tossing and turning for hours. Sometimes, I stare at the clock just to watch time go by. I can't get comfortable, and it's like my head is turning constantly. I'm always tired during the day and even when I do sleep, I don't feel rested when I wake up..." –Anonymous

Does this sound like you? If so, you, like many people, may be experiencing symptoms of insomnia. In a recent study, 80% of Americans said that they included "getting more sleep" in their New Year's resolution.

There are three major types of insomnia: Initial, Middle, and Terminal. *Initial insomnia* refers to difficulty falling asleep but sleeping throughout the night. *Middle insomnia* is characterized by randomly waking numerous times in the middle of the night and having difficulty falling back to sleep. *Terminal insomnia* occurs when people wake up much earlier than they meant to and cannot get back to sleep. It is not uncommon for an individual to display multiple types of insomnia. One of the difficulties of managing insomnia is that there are so many possible causes.

Here are some suggestions to help you gain better sleep quality and a more meaningful waking day.

Bed-Etiquette

To put it simply, you should only use your bed for sleeping and sex! Lying in bed while watching television, reading for extended periods of time, eating, surfing the web, or playing video games, can make falling asleep difficult and may lead to the development of Initial Insomnia. Your body also associates sleep and your location. If you only sleep in a bed, rather than a couch or chair, your body will become accustomed to the bed as the designated location for sleep, and you will begin to feel tired simply by laying on it.

Food for Thought

When you eat your final meal for the day, how much time do you give yourself between that last bite and the time you plan on going to sleep? Eating or drinking too much before bed can have you waking up in the middle of the night with stomach aches or trips to the bathroom. This can contribute to Middle Insomnia and minor health problems such as indigestion or acid reflux. There should be approximately two and a half to three hours between the time of eating, which includes snacks, and sleep to better your chances of a good night's rest. Do not drink caffeine after 3pm and don't eat sugar after 9pm.

Less Light Can Mean More Sleep

Although it seems obvious, sleep can be heavily impacted by the amount of light in your bedroom. Your body operates on a sleep-wake cycle known as Circadian Rhythm, and when there is light present, it can be interrupted. This can cause early waking or trouble getting to sleep. Studies have shown that too much light can also prevent REM cycle sleep, which is when the best quality sleep takes place. Light from the television, lamps, computers, or street lights may keep you from high

quality sleep. When you are preparing to go to sleep, be sure to turn off any electronic devices which produce too much light, close any blinds letting light in, and use a blindfold if you feel that there is still enough light to keep you awake.

STRESS!

Worrying about your job, kids, finances, and other things can keep your mind busy at night and interrupt your sleep. Your heart actually reacts to this stress and can increase blood pressure and beats per minute causing restlessness. Unfortunately, there isn't an "off button" for stress. However, recognizing that you tend to worry before bed can help you implement preventative strategies. Exercise can help reduce stress, but make sure you don't exercise too close to bed time, try to have at least one hour to wind down before you try to go to sleep. Place a notebook next to your bed, with a flashlight for midnight awakenings, where you can jot down thoughts and get them out of your head. If you know you tend to ruminate before bed, practice some progressive relaxation techniques, meditation, or yoga. You might also try tea or warm milk. It's not an urban legend! If you find yourself depending on sleep medication, you may want to talk to your medical doctor or seek help from a therapist. If these techniques are not enough, you may want to consult with a doctor to see if you have a medical problem, or a therapist to help reduce your stress and develop healthy behaviors you can take home to end the late night restlessness.