

Integrated Regional Falls Program



North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN

Insomnia, Sleep Hygiene and Relaxation Techniques

What is insomnia?

Insomnia is defined as the perception or complaint of inadequate or poor-quality sleep such as; difficulty falling asleep, waking up frequently during the night with difficulty returning to sleep, waking up too early in the morning, or unrefreshing sleep (National Sleep Foundation, 2014). In a recent poll, it was found that 44 percent of older persons experience one or more of the nighttime symptoms of insomnia at least a few nights per week or more (National Sleep Foundation, 2009).

How does insomnia affect my well-being?

Insomnia or sleep deprivation, can affect us both physically and mentally. Physically, lack of sleep can diminish muscle strength and endurance, increase wear and tear on the vital organs, heighten our sensitivity to pain, disrupt insulin production and sugar metabolism, increasing the risk of diabetes, and can weaken our immune system, which decreases defenses against illness. Mentally, lack of sleep can cause confusion, distortion of memory, depression and decreased mental capacity.

What causes insomnia?

Many factors can contribute to insomnia. Acute insomnia often happens because of life circumstances such as stressful or bad news. This is a passing sleep disruption, and it tends to resolve without any treatment.



Chronic insomnia is disrupted sleep that occurs at least three nights per week and lasts at least three months. Chronic insomnia disorders can have many causes such as:

- Stress and anxiety: death of a loved one or other significant life changes that cause worry and distraction may affect sleep.
- Poor sleep hygiene: behaviors, pre-sleep habits, the bed or surrounding environment may not be optimal for sleep.
- Consumption of stimulants: Coffee, nicotine or other stimulants consumed close to bedtime may induce a "wired" feeling.
- Consumption of alcohol: Alcohol has a sedating effect initially promoting sleep, but later inhibits REM and interrupts sleep.
- Phase Advance: with age, the brain's internal clock shifts to an earlier sleep cycle.
- Polypharmacy: an increase in the number of medications can create side effects and a greater chance for drug interactions.
- Depression: depression is more common in the elderly, and insomnia is often a symptom. (Conversely, insomnia may also cause depression.)
- Pain. arthritis, osteoporosis or other conditions causing physical pain or discomfort.
- Frequent Urination: waking up to go to the bathroom throughout the night.

- Movement and Sleep Disorders: restless leg syndrome, periodic limb movement disorder, snoring, sleep apnea, and others are linked to insomnia.
- Neurodegenerative Disorders: Dementia, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Lou Gehrig's disease and other similar disorders can cause insomnia.

What is Sleep Hygiene?

“Sleep Hygiene”, is a term used to describe habits and practices that are conducive to sleeping well on a regular basis. Following are ways to improve your sleep hygiene:

- Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool
- Use the bedroom only for sleep; avoid watching TV in bed
- Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before bed
- Avoid caffeine 4 to 6 hours before bedtime; no caffeine after lunch if you are sensitive to caffeine
- Avoid nicotine and alcohol close to bedtime
- Exercise regularly but not right before bed
- Limit napping during the day; nap less than 1 hour before 3pm
- Don't take your worries to bed
- Practice relaxation techniques before bed



What can I do to relax before bedtime?

Relaxation techniques to help you go to sleep:

Breathing - inhale deeply through your nose, pucker your lips and exhale slowly. Breathe out as long as possible. Imagine the sound of your breath exhaling is the tension draining from your body.

Counting – Close your eyes and relax. Count backwards slowly from 100 to zero. Visualize the numbers being written slowly and carefully, on a staircase with the numbers descending with the stairs.

Creating Pictures – Imagine a quiet setting; sitting in the sand at the beach. “Feel” the image; feel the sun on your face, the sand between your toes, the breeze on your skin and the smell of the ocean air.

Floating - Imagine you are floating on air. Picture yourself floating like a falling leaf. The lower you float the calmer you feel.

Please note, chronic insomnia is often a result of a more serious underlying cause. Always check with your family doctor before using any over-the-counter medicinal sleeping aid. Such medications can interact with your other prescribed medications and sleeping pills can be very risky in the elderly. Side effects of sleeping pills include; dizziness, loss of balance, and disorientation, increasing the **risk of falls**. Improving your sleep hygiene and trying some relaxation techniques should be your first approach to improving your sleep.



References

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