

Tinnitus - insomnia and sleep problems

True insomnia is defined as poor sleep followed by daytime fatigue. About half the people who experience distressing levels of tinnitus initially report some sleep disturbances. The need for sleep varies between individuals. The real issue is not how much sleep you have, but how you feel during the day.

Effects of insomnia

The daytime effects of insomnia are the main problem. These effects can include:

- Physical tiredness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling depressed, irritable or lethargic.

Putting insomnia into perspective

One bad night's sleep doesn't really affect your performance the next day, although you may feel lethargic, irritable or moody. Short sleep for a week may make you feel pathologically tired, but these effects disappear after one good night's sleep.

The link between tinnitus and insomnia

Researchers have found no correlation between the loudness or pitch of sounds associated with tinnitus and the presence of sleep disturbances. Insomnia is linked to other factors that occur in conjunction with tinnitus, such as stress.

Factors that contribute to insomnia

Sleep disturbance usually involves an interaction of the following factors:

- **Health problems** – for example, arthritis, migraines or asthma
- **Psychological factors** – for example, stress or emotional crisis
- **Drug use** – for example, alcohol or sleeping medication
- **Disturbing environments** – for example, an uncomfortable bed or intrusive lighting
- **Conditioning** – for example, the more you associate bed with struggling to get to sleep, the harder it is to relax there.

Suggestions for managing your sleep better

To successfully resolve your sleep disturbance, you will need to address all the contributing factors.

Learn to relax physically

Research has shown that relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, biofeedback and progressive relaxation can work well. Experiment and find the technique that works for you. You can:

- Attend a regular relaxation class
- Use a self-help relaxation tape.

Have a regular bedtime

If you are not asleep after half an hour, get up and go into another room and do something quiet and relaxing. The same applies if you wake up in the night. Remember, don't go to bed if you don't feel sleepy. Do something quiet and relaxing until you do feel sleepy.

Reduce foods and drinks that increase sleep disturbances

It may help if you avoid eating heavy meals just before bedtime. It is also a good idea to reduce your late afternoon and evening consumption of:

- Alcohol
- Chocolate
- Tea, coffee and caffeinated soft drinks
- Cigarettes.

Keep fit

Regular exercise helps you to cope better with stress and reduce fatigue, both of which can make sleeping more difficult or disturbed.

Get medical advice

Seek medical advice if you have any physical problems that contribute to your sleep disturbance. If sleep problems persist, seek professional help. Don't try to put up with them.

Other strategies that may help

You should also:

- Try and get up at the same time every day.
- Reserve your bed for sleeping – avoid arguments or serious discussions in bed.
- Avoid naps during the day.
- Experiment with low-intensity background noises in the bedroom: for example, leave the radio playing softly or play tape recordings of ocean surf.

Where to get help

- Tinnitus Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9770 6075
- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Insomnia is defined as poor sleep followed by daytime fatigue.
- Insomnia associated with tinnitus is caused by factors other than the loudness or pitch of tinnitus noises.
- To overcome your sleep disturbance, you will need to address all the contributing factors.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Tinnitus Association of Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2011 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.