Sleep - insomnia
Insomnia is a symptom, not a disease. The cause (or causes) of insomnia needs to be identified and corrected. Insomnia means having trouble with how well or how much you sleep. People keep themselves awake by worrying about going to sleep. Long-term chronic insomnia needs professional support and a lot of patience.

Insomnia is a symptom, not a disease. It means being concerned with how much you sleep or how well you sleep. This may be caused by difficulties in either falling or staying asleep. Self-reported sleeping problems, dissatisfaction with sleep quality and daytime tiredness are the only defining characteristics of insomnia. It is an individual perception of sleep. Long-term chronic insomnia needs professional support from a sleep disorder clinic.

The concept of ‘a good sleep’ differs widely from person to person. While the average night’s sleep for an adult is around eight hours, some people only need five, while others like up to 10 hours or more. What seems like insomnia to one person might be considered a good sleep by another.

Insomnia is a common complaint
Over one third of people experience insomnia from time to time, but only around five per cent need treatment for the condition. Transient or short-term insomnia is typically caused by such things as stressful life events, jet lag, changes in sleeping environments, some acute medical illnesses and stimulant medications. Normal sleeping habits return once the acute event is over.

If a person has experienced sleeping difficulties for a month or more, this is called persistent or chronic insomnia. There are many causes of persistent insomnia. These include:

- **Secondary insomnia** – due to a range of medical and psychiatric problems and the chronic use of drugs and alcohol.
- **Primary sleep disorders** – include circadian rhythm disorders, central sleep apnoea-insomnia syndrome, inadequate sleep syndromes and periodic limb movement or restless legs syndromes.
- **Idiopathic insomnia** – sleeplessness without a known cause, formerly called childhood onset insomnia.

Keep sleep in perspective
People who suffer from insomnia are normally frustrated or annoyed by it. Paradoxically, this emotional state contributes to keeping them awake, starting a vicious cycle. It helps to stop expecting a set amount of sleep every night. Having less sleep than you’d like doesn’t cause any harm. Allow yourself to fall short of the ideal without getting anxious about it.

Home remedies for short-term insomnia
Reducing anxiety and sticking to a day–night routine can improve sleep quality. Suggestions include:

- Don’t nap during the day.
- Cut down on smoking and drinking.
- Avoid tea, coffee and other caffeinated drinks before bed.
- Don’t exercise strenuously before bedtime.
- Do something to relax, such as meditate or have a warm bath.
- Only go to bed if you feel sleepy.
- Go to bed later.
- Stop reading, worrying or watching television in bed and limit your activities in the bedroom to sleeping and sex.
- If you can’t sleep, get up, go to another room and do something else until you feel sleepy again.
- Get up at the same time every morning regardless of how much sleep you have had.
- Avoid ‘judging’ your sleep on a day-to-day basis.

Treatment for long-term insomnia
Insomnia that has persisted for years needs professional support and a lot of patience. It might take some time to re-establish normal sleeping patterns.

Some of the techniques used by a sleep disorder clinic might include:

- A sleep diary, to help pinpoint the pattern of insomnia
- A program of mild sleep deprivation
- Medication to help set up a new sleeping routine
- Exposure to bright light in the morning
- Behavioural therapy.
Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Sleep disorder clinic

Things to remember

- Insomnia is a symptom, not a disease. The cause (or causes) of insomnia needs to be identified and corrected.
- Insomnia means having trouble with how well or how much you sleep.
- People keep themselves awake by worrying about going to sleep.
- Long-term chronic insomnia needs professional support and a lot of patience.

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Sleep

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- Sleep basics
  - Mood and sleep
    - Getting enough sleep is vital. Long term sleep deficiency can affect your mood. You can improve your sleep quality...
  - Shiftwork
    - A person working the night shift is at greater risk of various disorders and accidents...
  - Sleep deprivation
    - A fatigued person is accident prone and more likely to make mistakes and bad decisions...
  - Sleep explained
    - Fatigue is thought to cause about one in six road accidents - make sure you get enough sleep...

- Children and sleep
  - Dummies
    - Dummy sucking should stop before school age to avoid teeth or mouth problems...
  - Sleep and your baby
    - Sleeping habits are learned, so try to set up a bedtime routine for your baby as soon as you can...
  - Sleep - children and naps
    - A child needs a daytime nap until they are around two and a half to three years of age...
  - Sleep - children and nightmares
    - Your child may have only a few scary dreams a year, or be troubled by nightmares much more often...
  - Teenagers and sleep
    - Sleep research suggests that teenagers need between eight and 10 hours of sleep every night...

- Sleep related conditions
  - Teeth grinding
    - Tooth grinding (bruxism) is involuntary clenching or grinding of the teeth, usually during sleep...
  - Snoring
    - Snoring isn't harmful but may lead to long-term sleep deprivation...
  - Sleep - common disorders
Sleep disorders can prevent some people from getting enough sleep.

- **Sleep - hypersomnia**
  Hypersomnia means excessive sleepiness - it can have a number of different causes.

- **Sleep - narcolepsy**
  A person with narcolepsy is extremely sleepy all the time and may fall asleep several times a day.

- **Sleep - insomnia**
  Around one in three people regularly have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

- **Restless legs syndrome (RLS)**
  Restless legs syndrome has been described as a type of cramp, soreness or a creeping, crawling feeling.

- **Sleep apnoea**
  A person with sleep apnoea may wake hundreds of times every night.

- **Jet lag**
  If you suffer badly from jet lag, it may be worthwhile considering a westerly travel route if possible.

### Managing sleep problems

- **Sleep hygiene**
  You can retrain your body and mind so that you sleep well and wake feeling rested.

- **Mood and sleep**
  Getting enough sleep is vital. Long term sleep deficiency can affect your mood. You can improve your sleep quality.

- **Fatigue fighting tips**
  Activity and nutrition help fight fatigue and put more energy into your daily life.

### Related Information

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### Related information on other websites

- [Australasian Sleep Association](#)

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