

## What is Insomnia?

Primary insomnia is more than just transient sleep difficulties, it is persistent problems with sleep, lasting for more than one month, and may include:

- Difficulty falling asleep - also known as onset insomnia
- Waking up on and off during the night - also known as middle insomnia
- Waking up very early and not returning to sleep
- Unsatisfactory sleep quality

These are different to other sleep problems, such as excessive daytime sleepiness, effects of shift work and jet-lag, or nightmares and sleepwalking.

Surprisingly, insomnia is the most common psychological health problem - it has been estimated that 15-30% of the adult population suffers from insomnia, with twice as many women as men suffering. Insomnia becomes more common as we get older, but it affects a range of ages. Most of us experience problems with sleep at some point in our lives, generally when under stress, but you should consider seeking help for what we call chronic insomnia. This is when your

problems with sleep have lasted for more than one month or if you cannot get a good night's sleep without sleeping pills.

Insomnia is often associated with other psychological disorders such as depression, generalised anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. People may underplay the importance of insomnia by regarding it as just a symptom of another issue, when in fact it may require treatment in its own right.

### Impact of Insomnia

Although insomnia is common, it is certainly not a minor issue. Ongoing sleep problems can impact on your functioning during the daytime as well as night. People who do not sleep well may experience:

- Low mood or easily irritable
- Poor memory & concentration
- Trouble staying alert
- Worry about not sleeping
- Poor work performance
- Conflict in relationships
- Less quality of life

If you are experiencing some of these consequences of poor sleep, then you may need to seek help.

### Causes of Insomnia

There is a wide range of factors which may contribute to insomnia. Just some of these factors are:

- Restless legs or twitching legs during sleep
- Pain
- Side effects of medications
- Alcohol - leads to more fitful, less refreshing sleep
- Caffeine and nicotine
- Severe anxiety or depression
- Stressful life events
- Habits such as daytime napping
- Dependence on sleeping medication

There may be one set of factors associated with the initial causes of insomnia, and quite another that keeps insomnia going and makes into a chronic problem. The Vicious Cycle of Insomnia People can become stuck in a vicious cycle of insomnia, developing habits or beliefs which help keep the sleep problems going beyond the original cause. For example:

### Management of Insomnia

There are many medications which are used to treat insomnia, yet these are usually only effective in the short-term. For long-term management of sleep problems, you may need to consider strategies such as sleep hygiene, cognitive therapy, and reducing your stress levels.

