

Tips for Insomnia

About 15% of people experience chronic insomnia- the inability to fall asleep within ½ hour or early morning waking and the inability to fall back asleep. It is believed that people need a minimum of 5 hours per night of sleep.

Causes range from stress, depression, lifestyle habits that impair sleep, diet (especially caffeine), hot flashes, medical conditions such as breathing disorders and stimulants.

The first line is to change behavior:

- Exercise during the day so as to be physically tired when you are mentally tired, but do not exercise too close to bedtime.
- Go to bed only when sleepy.
- Consider meditation or relaxation therapy.
- Use bedroom only for sleep and sex.
- Go to another room when unable to sleep and engage in quiet activities and return to bed only when sleepy.
- Have a regular sleep and wake time.
- Avoid napping.
- Correct extraneous factors (snoring partner, pets, and temperature)
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, decongestants or other medications that can act as stimulants.

Next try:

Over the counter remedies such as Melatonin or sedating antihistamines (be aware that there may be residual sedation in the morning with the antihistamines).

Finally, consider prescription medication. Be aware that many of these medications can lead to tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms. They should be approached with caution and using

sparingly and for the briefest time possible.
Medications used for this include those designed for relaxation and sedation as well as antidepressants.

Reference:

Silber MH. Chronic Insomnia. *New Engl Jour Med*
2005; 353: 803-10