



Don Quixote extols sleep as “Meat for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, heat for the cold, and cold for the hot ... the current coin that purchases all the pleasures of the world cheap; and the balance that sets the king and the shepherd, the fool and the wise man even.” If you sleep blissfully, you may not relish Quixote’s words as intensely as those who suffer from insomnia. However, if you are among New Zealand’s more than 400,000 insomniacs or Australia’s more than two million searching for the causes of your sleeplessness, now you can confirm some of the sleep-depriving culprits you have suspected, identify more elusive ones, then employ some common sense tips and discover some natural solutions for sweet sleep too.

Monika Fuhs, director of the Holistic Learning Institute in Vienna, Austria, says, “Sleeplessness is a serious problem.

Nearly 40 per cent of all people over 40 suffer sleeping disorders, and even the number of children sufferers rises constantly. A body which does not relax is endangered because of increased potential of elevated blood pressure and heart attack. Insomniacs may endanger others because of lack of concentration that can precipitate accidents.

If we sleep tight, it helps us to stay healthy and recover from our daily challenges.”

# Insidious Insomnia

## sleuthing for solutions

by Linda Davis Kyle

### Recognising the Top Troublemakers

Dr James F Balch names daytime napping as the top culprit that prevents restorative night sleep and says if you must, then nap before 1 pm for 30 minutes or less. Likewise, attempting to recapture missed sleep by staying in bed past the normal rising time after poor sleep, merely makes sleeping the following night more problematic and “repeated association of the bed with unsuccessful sleep attempts may result in a conditioned arousal in the home sleeping environment,” so reports Jack

Edinger, PhD, of Duke University School of Medicine. Edinger also says the often condoned, yet insidious, offender of continuing mentally taxing work for too many hours and not allotting “sufficient wind-down time before bed” will create “sleep initiation” difficulties. This vicious cycle invites a downward spiral that destroys health, joy and relationships.

Minding and mending relationships, and promptly addressing the stressors of acute or short-term insomnia, possibly

can prevent the development of occasional periodic insomnia and even chronic or ongoing insomnia. Is your insomnia acute and related to a specific upset such as working night shifts, losing a job, relocating, experiencing jet lag, having been ill, or grieving the death of a loved one? If you do not nap or try to recapture lost sleep by lounging or overwork, and overstress yourself and have not experienced overwhelming upsets, but still cannot sleep, what can you do? ➔

## Ferretting Out Other Disturbers

Too much food near bedtime, or consuming spicy or fatty foods or caffeinated coffee, tea, some soft drinks, chocolate or cocoa may disrupt sleep. About two hours before bedtime, though, having a banana or dates, figs, cashews or tuna that contain tryptophan, a sleep-supporting amino acid, may help. It is equally beneficial to get enough protein and nutrient-dense foods in your overall diet. **So, you may want to keep an observation diary.**

1. Do certain foods or food allergies affect your sleep? If you avoid beverages after 7 pm, do you sleep more soundly?
2. Do you sleep better if you take your high quality food supplements early in the day to eliminate any possible stimulating effect? Amino acids such as phenylalanine and tyrosine, the adaptogenic herb, ginseng, the anti depressant herb, St John's Wort, and the supplement SAM-e can be arousing. Some pharmaceuticals disrupt sleep patterns. Even pharmaceutical sleep formulas may be either short-lived or habit-forming.
3. Do you sleep well at your current weight, or do you feel the need to modify your weight?
4. Do you exercise reasonably and regularly for overall good health and deeper sleep? Exercising too vigorously near bedtime can either overstimulate or overtire you, but some gentle yoga relaxation poses can enhance sleep as can a soothing massage.
5. Sleep medicine specialists differ on the cool or warm shower or bath before bedtime advice. Determine which temperature and style works for you.
6. Do you sleep better in comfortably fitting all cotton or 100 per cent silk sleepwear, or no garments? Do you sleep better wearing warm wool socks, or do you sleep better with cool feet?
7. Do you or your sleep partner snore? This could possibly indicate sleep apnoea, which needs professional evaluation. Is your room well ventilated? Do environmental airborne allergies or air that is either too dry or too humid hinder your breathing? A humidifier or a dehumidifier can correct these air quality problems, respectively.

8. Do you perhaps have underlying conditions that a trusted health care professional could diagnose and treat? Primary insomnia is not related directly to any other health condition or problem. Secondary insomnia, though, is the by-product of another health condition such as anxiety, depression, stress, hyperthyroidism, head trauma, arthritis, menopause, pain, cardiac or pulmonary concerns, or other sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnoea, restless legs syndrome, night terrors and sleep walking.
9. Does jotting a To-Do List before sleep make you feel in control so you can go back to sleep if you wake up too early?
10. What was different about your day when a good night's sleep followed it? Keep sleuthing.

## Taking Action

Avoid making your bedroom a TV room or office, and avoid painting the walls stimulating colours. Dedicate your bedroom to sleep and intimacy. To create a quiet, restful haven, limit the number of electric appliances to reduce energy fields, don't let your clock haunt you, and paint your bedroom walls soft blues or greens or your compatible feng shui colour. Become Goldilocks to find the just right everything for you. Have enough space for yourself on a mattress that is not too hard or too soft. Try comfortable all-cotton pillowcases and sheets, and a therapeutic, non-allergenic foam pillow to cradle your head and support your neck. Try the Alexander technique of placing a small cushion under your knees if you sleep on your back or between your knees if you sleep on your side. Hug a pillow to comfort your overlying arm and shoulder.

Sleep in quiet with the temperature that is right for you. Use ear plugs or white noise to shut out any undesirable sounds. Wear an eye mask to sleep in total darkness to bolster your circadian rhythm.

## Nurturing Your Circadian Rhythm

Dr Vasant Lad says the Ayurvedic lifestyle ("the ultimate preventive medicine") maintains the natural biological and physiological 24-hour cycles of activity and fosters deep sleep. Its highlights involve regularly waking near sunrise, appreciating the Divine Reality, exercising, meditating, eating a wholesome breakfast, walking alone or with a companion or pet in the gentle morning sun for exercise and natural vitamin D, enjoying worthwhile work, refreshing with brief breaks, consuming a nutritious lunch, ceasing work near sunset, savouring a healthful dinner, then relaxing until retiring around 10 pm. If you follow this or a mutually health-giving lifestyle and still do not sleep well, what can you do?

## Evaluating Sleep Patterns

Sleep medicine clinics can evaluate your sleep pattern, but some sleep laboratories may limit their focus, and their affiliated physicians may favour pharmaceuticals. So, investigate before you go in case your problem manifests as more than a classic textbook sleep disorder or if you prefer to forgo drugs. Any medico can prescribe pharmaceuticals that may alleviate your insomnia for a while and then possibly hit you with a rebound effect when you divorce them. Dr Julian Whitaker has reported that "more than 180,000 Americans under the age of 20 take sleep medications", and more than 6 per cent over 65 do.



## Recognising Natural Modalities

In Texas, enlightened physicians such as complementary and homeopathic specialist Lawrence M Cohen and sleep medicine specialist and neurologist J Douglas Hudson are good about recommending alternative approaches. Cohen encourages diaphragmatic breathing, meditation, yoga and biofeedback; and Hudson sometimes prescribes alternatives such as acupuncture or an Alpha-Stimulator® and/or biofeedback. Daniel L Kirsch, designer of Alpha-Stim® instruments, the “leader in microcurrent and cranial electrotherapy stimulation (CES)”, vouches for their safety and efficacy.

Lynda Kirk, highly regarded biofeedback expert and speaker at the 10th Anniversary Biofeedback Foundation of Europe (BFE), explains, “Biofeedback and EEG Neurofeedback coupled with stress reduction and relaxation training provide an effective nonchemical alternative to treat chronic insomnia. Noninvasive instruments amplify the body’s electrical signals and translate them into sight and sound feedback allowing patients to control their often unconscious physiological conditioned responses to various troubling stimuli. Empowering patients to alter their patterns helps reduce and erase symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue to mend the mind-body relationship and enhance relaxation and sleep. Biofeedback also can address other disorders such as bruxism, hyperactivity, high blood pressure, abnormal heart rate and drug dependence, which can play a role in insomnia as well.” There is little wonder, then, why Erik Peper, BFE president and co-director of the Institute for Holistic Healing Studies in San Francisco, says, “Biofeedback as a major tool in self-regulation should be the first intervention tried instead of the last to treat insomnia.”

Among the aforementioned natural approaches for weary insomniacs also are cognitive behavioural therapy, progressive muscular relaxation, autogenics, emotional freedom technique, Reiki, acupuncture, chiropractic care, Nambudripad Allergy Elimination Technique (NAET), the hormone melatonin, the amino acid L-theanine, herbs such as valerian and hops, or homeopathic



remedies such as Coffea and Chamomilla, among others.

## Respecting Restorative Sleep

If you have searched desperately for the causes of your sleeplessness and tried countless remedies without relief, then it is no secret that it takes a caring health professional who leaves no stone unturned in guiding you to discover and conquer the tangled causes. Being irritable, feeling exhausted, and losing concentration and memory are ramifications of insomnia. Never disrespect the huge importance of restorative sleep to body, mind, and spirit. What Macbeth has said, is true.

*Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.*  
— Macbeth, Shakespeare

Sleeplessness is potentially catastrophic if it takes hold insidiously, breaks your energy, undermines your immune system, and invites discomforts and diseases. Aldous Huxley said it best: “That we are not much sicker and much madder than we are, is due exclusively to that most blessed and blessing of all natural graces, sleep.” Never forget sleep, the great keystone, in a balanced, healthful lifestyle. Sweet dreams. ✍️  
References available on request.

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