

# 5 Proven Ways to Conquer Your Sleepless Nights

It's 3 a.m. and you're lying awake—again.

It's the fourth night this week that you've woken in the middle of the night. Some nights it takes an hour or more to fall back asleep.

Some nights you don't fall back asleep at all.

This is how insomnia works. You either can't fall asleep, can't stay asleep, or both. It can last for just a little while, or stick around long-term.

Either way, it's taking a toll on your body and impacting your quality of life.

Studies have shown that 10 to 30 percent of people worldwide experience insomnia. This common sleep disorder can lead to daytime fatigue, irritability, mood disturbances, difficulty concentrating, and impaired work performance.



Chronic insomnia can also increase the risk of developing mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety. It can take a toll on your overall physical and emotional health, and make your existing medical conditions worse.

If you're dealing with insomnia, it's critical that you deal with it for the sake of your well-being and daily functioning.



### What causes insomnia?

Stress, anxiety, and depression are among the most common causes of insomnia. These conditions can disrupt the normal sleep-wake cycle.

People who feel stressed, anxious, or depressed often experience racing thoughts, worry, and physical tension. When this happens, it can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep.

Cortisol, the primary stress hormone in your body that regulates many of your health functions, can also interfere with the body's natural sleep process.

And when people feel stressed or anxious, they may do or consume things that can further worsen their sleep. This includes drinking caffeine, eating unhealthy food, or using electronic devices before bedtime.

If you suffer from chronic pain, asthma, and allergies, you may also have trouble sleeping.

When you're experiencing pain and can't find a comfortable sleeping position, it can make it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep. If you deal with asthma or allergies, your sleep may be disrupted by breathing issues.

On top of that, some of the medications used to treat these conditions identify insomnia as a side effect.

It's important to take care of any medical and psychological issues you may have as a first step to ending sleepless nights. When your sleep improves, so does your quality of life.



### What insomnia looks like

If you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or both, you're dealing with insomnia. Its symptoms can vary in duration and severity. These include:

1. Difficulty falling asleep: You have trouble falling asleep or it takes longer than 30 minutes to fall asleep.
2. Waking up frequently during the night: You wake up frequently during the night and have trouble getting back to sleep.
3. Waking up too early: You wake up too early in the morning and have trouble falling back asleep.

4. Daytime fatigue: You're tired during the day, drowsy, and lack energy. This can affect your overall functioning and performance at work or school.

5. Mood disturbances: Insomnia can lead to irritability, anxiety, and depression. This can make your sleep quality and overall well-being worse.

Left untreated, insomnia can negatively affect your physical and mental health. Chronic insomnia may put you at a higher risk of developing mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and mood disorders. It can also increase your risk of developing medical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

And the hazards of trying to function without proper sleep are just as bad. Insomnia can affect your job performance, cause accidents, and impair your ability to drive.



### **How to prevent and treat insomnia**

Treating insomnia starts with better sleep hygiene. Here are some tips to improve yours:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. This regulates your body's internal clock



- Create a relaxing bedtime routine that signals to your body that it's time to wind down. This could include activities such as reading a book, taking a warm bath, or practicing relaxation techniques like meditation
- Make sure your bedroom is ideal for sleeping by keeping it cool, dark, and quiet..
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine, and electronics with blue light (including your smartphones or computer) before bedtime
- Be physically active during the day and avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime
- Avoid naps or limit them to 20 to 30 minutes in the early afternoon.

If you have chronic insomnia, which is characterized by repeatedly being unable to fall asleep or stay asleep, you may need to get professional help.

Your health care provider may suggest trying a prescription sleep medication. If you prefer a more natural approach, you could try a herbal supplement like valerian root, chamomile, or passionflower. Acupuncture, meditation, and cognitive behavior therapy for insomnia are worth trying, too.

Set up an appointment with your health care professional to discuss the most suitable option(s) for you.

### **End your sleepless nights**

Insomnia is a serious condition that you shouldn't ignore, especially if you have a long-term pattern of being unable to fall asleep or stay asleep.

If you're dealing with insomnia, start by taking a look at your sleeping habits. Are you drinking coffee or scrolling through your phone before bed? Do you take long naps during the day? These things can all affect your ability to sleep.

And if improving your sleep hygiene doesn't seem to be working, reach out to your health care professional to discuss medication options, or consider herbal supplements or alternative treatments like acupuncture.