

The Columbus Community Health Regional Sleep Disorders Center

1430 South High Street, Columbus OH 43207 - (614) 443-7800

For more information, visit The Sleep Site (www.thesleepsite.com)

INFORMATION ON INSOMNIA

What is insomnia? Not a disease or diagnosis--just a term for difficulty falling asleep and/or staying asleep.

Why not just treat it with sleeping pills? Because some causes of insomnia are serious and may be worsened by sleeping pills. Also, frequent use of many sleeping pills can ensure that they will become ineffective and that insomnia will persist.

What are the three basic types of insomnia? Which of these do you have? Several types may apply to you:

-1. Inability to fall asleep initially, remaining fully awake until sleep finally occurs. Possible specific factors include the following:

- RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME refers to an unpleasant, nervous or "antsy" sensation in the legs, relieved by walking.
- PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL INSOMNIA can involve worrying about being able to sleep to the point it keeps you awake!
- INADEQUATE SLEEP HYGIENE such as excess caffeine, vigorous exercise before bedtime and poor sleep habits.
- CHRONIC USE OF SLEEPING PILLS, STIMULANTS OR ALCOHOL.
- PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT: for example, chronic pain or shortness of breath.
- ANXIETY AND MOOD DISORDERS can interfere with sleep onset or ability to "stay asleep".
- DELAYED SLEEP PHASE SYNDROME. Some people are "night owls". Light therapy often helps.

-2. Waking up too early with inability to return to sleep. Can result from depression but also, from abnormal events--such as breathing abnormalities--occurring during sleep that may remain undiagnosed until sleep studies are performed.

-3. Difficulty falling asleep due to repeated "dozing and arousing", or sleep that is too "light" and/or fragmented by repeated awakenings. There are many possible causes, and some of them can be serious. Examples include:

- SLEEP APNEA AND RELATED BREATHING DISORDERS. These problems are extremely common. If severe, they can cause heart failure,

heart attacks, high blood pressure, development of coronary heart disease and strokes.

- REFLUX OF STOMACH ACID UP INTO THE ESOPHAGUS--which can occur without any symptoms. of heartburn!
- SEIZURES OCCURRING IN SLEEP.
- PERIODIC LIMB MOVEMENT SYNDROME--repeated leg jerks during sleep.

If you suffer from insomnia, what should you do?

Don't jump to sleeping pills! Analyze the problem to determine its cause. Treatments work best when we know what we're treating. Also, sleeping pills may be unsafe and make you worse.

Particularly if you are experiencing repeated awakenings, light, fragmented sleep or early morning awakenings not due to depression, it may be advisable to seek assessment by a sleep medicine specialist. Otherwise, the cause of your insomnia may never be identified, and effective, safe treatment may be impossible. You can arrange an assessment by calling (614) 443-7800.

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