

Ending the Nightmare of Insomnia

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A significant percentage of Americans have always struggled with insomnia but more Americans than ever are now losing sleep due to concerns about the state of the U.S. economy and other personal financial concerns, according to a recent poll released by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF). Treatment is available to help people learn to be good sleepers again and to taper and discontinue sleeping medications slowly and safely. Ideally taught by a doctoral level psychologist, who is also board-certified by the American Board of Sleep Medicine, the treatment involves cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and consists of two to four individual sessions.

Insomnia is the inability to get the amount of sleep you as an individual need to wake up feeling rested. It typically manifests as difficulty going to sleep, difficulty staying asleep, or waking too early. About 30-40% of adults say that they have symptoms of insomnia within a given year and about 10-15% say they have chronic insomnia. Insomnia can be either acute, lasting one to several nights, or chronic, lasting months to years. When insomnia persists for longer than a month, it is considered chronic. Some people with insomnia also struggle with dependence on sleeping pills. Many would like to learn how to sleep without them but discontinuation often leads to frustration and sleepless nights.

Common daytime problems associated with insomnia include attention and concentration difficulties, low mood, irritability, headaches, increased worry and fatigue. Insomnia often first appears during a stressful life event but sometimes persists even when the stressful event is over due to counterproductive sleep habits that were allowed to develop during this stressful period.

CBT focuses on education about sleep and sleep disorders, goal-setting with regard to sleep, and the practice of good "sleep hygiene," which is the practice of techniques such as stimulus control and sleep restriction that often improve insomnia.

Sleep restriction often deepens sleep quality and quantity; stimulus control helps people to learn to associate the bedroom with relaxation and sleep rather than with worry and frustration. Other topics include developing an optimal bedtime routine and analyzing of current sleep patterns to find areas that need improvement.

Sessions also focus on learning techniques to relax and "shut off the mind" at bedtime such as breathing techniques as well as practice in eliciting the "relaxation response." Sleep diaries are maintained throughout treatment and an insomnia textbook provides additional reading.

Most people would like to sleep without the use of medication, therefore the safe and slow tapering of sleeping medication is discussed as part of CBT. The complete discontinuation of sleeping medications is often achieved over time. Finally, as treatment concludes, relapse prevention is addressed.

If you also have depression, anxiety, pain (and other related problems or disorders), you may have associated insomnia and may benefit from CBT.

The success rate for CBT is about 85% which is higher than the typical results reported among people who complete weight loss and smoking cessation programs. About 85-90% of patients are still doing well when contacted one year following treatment.

The Sleep Medicine program at Gaylord Hospital offers CBT for insomnia in a medically-based setting which is accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. For an appointment or more information, call Gaylord Sleep Medicine at (203) 284-2818.

Gaylord Sleep Medicine has offices conveniently located in:

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