

## 5 Minute Med School

*Patients seem to really want two things: (1) an opinionated but quick overview of what ails them and (2) somebody they trust to go through the vast amount of health information out there and pick out the very best resources.*

- Dr. Mike Evans MD, Health Design Lab.

# Insomnia

## 5 Key Questions

 **Where do I start?** Define your core problem and deal with it. Common causes include shift work, being sedentary, depression, and pain. Worry is a good example: it usually gets worse when you are half awake and “catastrophize”. Break the cycle before it escalates by pre-answering your anxiety before bed (e.g. “I do have a presentation later this week, but I’ve set some time aside, and staying up won’t help.”)

 **How can I improve the day after a bad night?** If you assume the day after an inevitable bad night will be horrible then, sure enough, it will be. Instead of saying to yourself “I only had 4 hours of sleep last night—I will be a wreck today,” say “I only had four hours but that’s OK - it happens now and then. I’ll sleep better tonight.”

 **What is sleep hygiene?** It is the basics: no caffeine after lunch, limit alcohol (may help initially but breaks up your sleep later), and not arguing pre-bed. See the side bar for more tips.

 **Should I use sleeping pills?** Research<sup>a</sup> shows that sleeping pills might add 25 minutes to your sleep on average. The downside is that 1 in 6 people (especially older people) have a problem such as significant daytime fatigue, confusion and memory problems. People prone to addiction may want to steer clear and many will have a few bad nights when they stop taking sleeping pills. Talk about it with your doc or pharmacist.

 **What works best for insomnia?** Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (see over for resources) has been shown to be the single most effective cure for insomnia. A 2009 trial<sup>b</sup> showed that CBT put insomnia into remission for 7 out of 10 people with persistent insomnia. Combining CBT plus good sleep hygiene and the tips mentioned above should put you where you want to be: asleep.

## Key Actions

**Make the bedroom just for sleep and sex.** Many of my patients have a “media centre” in their bedroom. Associate your bedroom with sleeping— not TV. Think cool, dark and quiet.

**Don’t nap.** If you have not been taking “siestas” for years, napping will make it harder to get a normal sleep pattern going.

**Don’t clock watch.** If you are twisting and turning, get up and do something relaxing and then come back. Counter-intuitively, people who get up - sleep more.

**Be active.** Research shows that just adding walking or light aerobics can make a significant difference in sleep quality.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Glass J, et.al., BMJ 2005;331:1169 <sup>b</sup>Morin CM, et al, JAMA 2009, 301 (19), 2005-11 <sup>c</sup>King AC, et al, JAMA 1997, 277, 32-7



# Best Resources

We've looked through the world's resources to bring you the best ones.



<p><b>Websites</b></p> 	<p><a href="http://www.sleepeducation.com/">http://www.sleepeducation.com/</a> From the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Includes everything from useful tools like a sleep diary and a sleep apnea questionnaire to Ask an Expert and FAQs.</p> <hr/> <p><a href="http://www.sleepfoundation.com/">http://www.sleepfoundation.com/</a> This site from the National Sleep Foundation seems quite simple, but is a rich resource around sleep-related topics, problems, and polls.</p>
<p><b>Books</b></p> 	<p><b>Good Night</b> by Peter Breus (2006). Practical. Good overview but also drills down into basics (eg. redesigning bedroom, sleep apnea, etc.).</p> <hr/> <p><b>No More Sleepless Nights</b> by Peter Hauri and Shirley Linde (1996). Been around for a while but stands up to the test of time. Very helpful. Comes with a separate workbook if needed.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Insomniac</b> by Gayle Greene (2008). I like this book because it is from the patient perspective. It is very exhaustive. CBT doesn't really work for her so this English Prof articulates her experiences with many other possible solutions.</p>
<p><b>Videos</b></p> 	<p><a href="http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/articles/110.html">http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/articles/110.html</a> From the American Academy of Family Physicians. An excellent overview of insomnia.</p> <hr/> <p><a href="http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy/Pages/Introduction.aspx">http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy/Pages/Introduction.aspx</a> This is where you'll find a list of excellent wellness modules, one of which is on sleep, but all of which might help you whether your problem is stress, anger, or you need a problem solved</p>
<p><b>Tools</b></p> 	<p><a href="http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/skills/managing-well-being">http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/skills/managing-well-being</a> This is where you'll find a list of excellent wellness modules, one of which is on sleep, but all of which might help you whether your problem is stress, anger, or you need a problem solved.</p> <hr/> <p><a href="http://www.sleepeducation.blogspot.com/">http://www.sleepeducation.blogspot.com/</a> The blog from sleep education. Very simple and quite good analysis of new advances in sleep therapy.</p>