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How To Give Up Insomnia

By Elaine Currie, BA (Hons)

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I am writing this on a Sunday morning following a very restless night when sleep just didn't want to be my friend. I have suffered with insomnia for many years but, by using a combination of techniques, it is more or less under control.

Yesterday, I spent much too long working on changes to my website. I was enjoying it, so the time shot by. I ended up sending out for a big Chinese meal late in the evening. A vast quantity of spicy food was washed down with several glasses of wine. If you want to lie awake half the night, just do as I did. The remedy is simple and obvious. Time to get a grip on the lifestyle.

Self-inflicted insomnia is easily cured. What I call "real" insomnia is a beast of a much deeper hue, debilitating and much harder to defeat. Even so, it is not impossible to overcome and there is a whole range of things you can do to get the upper hand.

Here I should state that I do not pretend to have any special medical or therapeutic knowledge and I would not advise anybody to stop taking their prescribed medication. I am just sharing my experiences in the hope that they might help other people who are struggling through wakeful nights.

The following tips for getting off to sleep are pretty well known but I think they are worth repeating.

1. Keep the bedroom just for bed with no reminders of daytime activities like work or study. Decorate the room in restful colours and use soft lighting. Make sure the temperature is comfortable and the ventilation adequate. Hang curtains which are heavy enough to block out the early morning light.

3. Have a bedtime routine. This does not involve doing anything special, it is just a matter of doing the same things in the same order each night. We all have things we do regularly: empty the dishwasher, put out the cat, lock the front door, set the alarm, brush teeth etc. These routine things are our steps away from the activity of the day, towards the restful night.

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4. Make a soak in a warm bath part of your nightly ritual. Adding a few drops of aromatherapy oil to the water makes it doubly relaxing, soft background music makes the experience positively decadent.

5. Don't drink alcohol late at night. A nightcap might make you feel drowsy but it will disrupt your natural sleep rhythms and exacerbate your problem.

6. A warm milky drink is the best thing to have last thing at night. (Yes, our mothers were right when they made us drink cocoa.) There are tons of instant milky drinks available and most ranges have low fat options. If you don't like this milky, chocolatey type of drink, try out herbal teas but avoid anything containing caffeine.

7. Exercise is important but should be performed several hours before bedtime otherwise the adrenaline will still be pumping around your system and keeping you awake.

What if you follow the above tips, fall peacefully asleep and then wake up three hours later, in the dark middle of the night? To me, this is the most distressing type of insomnia. I know how it feels to wake up at 2.00 am, listen to the clock chime every hour round to 7.00 am, fall asleep and be rudely awakened by the alarm at 7.30. I always feel worse after that final snatched half hour of sleep than I felt in the middle of the night and sometimes get up insanely early to avoid it. The following tips can help you get back to sleep.

1. Recognise why you are awake. If you are too hot, cold or uncomfortable in any way, fix that problem. I often wake up thirsty, so I always have a jug of water at my bedside. Sometimes a drink of water is all that's needed to get back to sleep.

2. Relax by breathing slowly and deeply and by concentrating on tensing and then relaxing every muscle in your body, one by one, starting with toes and working upwards to your head.

3. Keep a pen and paper by your bed so if you are worrying about things you have to do, you can write them down in a list. This way you can stop worrying about forgetting anything important. As you write each thing down, visualise it leaving your brain and lodging itself on paper where you will find it safely in the morning. I find this exercise helps a lot if I have things on my mind.

If all this fails, you have been awake for over half an hour and know you are in for a long wakeful night; give up, get up, go do things. You won't feel any worse and you will probably feel better. There is no point in wasting those hours just lying there worrying about insomnia. If you feel sleepy further into the night, you can always go back to bed.

I gave up insomnia by sleeping whenever I could and getting up and doing things when I was wide awake even if it was the middle of the night. I decided to sleep when I could, not worry if I woke up at strange hours and not waste time tossing and turning in search of sleep. The decision to stop worrying was the key to my recovery.

I was fortunate in that I was not tied to a 9–5 work schedule, most of my work was done at home or in the library. All I had to do was make sure I was there for my children who were all school age.

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Over a few weeks I "enjoyed" a strange lifestyle. I would go to bed at my normal time, get up at any time of night when I couldn't sleep (usually between 3.00 am and 5.00 am) and read or write essays or do quiet household chores. Then I would get the children up and see that they had breakfast and got off to school. I would then, depending how I felt, carry on working or go to bed. My alarm would be set so that I did not have to worry about being asleep when the children came home from school (I never was: I think mothers have an internal alarm clock). I would sleep for as long as I needed and then get up and carry on with my day. At weekends I could sleep while the children were doing homework or out with their friends.

Gradually, my night-time sleep became longer and my spells of daytime sleep grew shorter. Without any effort or worrying, I reverted to a normal sleep pattern and resumed a conventional timetable.

Several years afterwards I came across this quotation: "If you can't sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there and worrying. It's the worry that gets you, not the loss of sleep". -- Dale Carnegie. I couldn't have put it better myself!

If you have commitments which prevent you from using this "cure", I suggest you give it a try over a

holiday weekend or any other time you can manage to be home for three or more consecutive days. You will not find sleep if you search for it or worry about it, relax and it will come to you.

This is one of a series of articles published by the author, Elaine Currie, BA(Hons) at <http://www.huntingvenus.com> The author's monthly newsletter is available free from <mailto:networkerhvm@ReportsNetwork.com>

Insomnia Treatment - Start To Sleep Well Again

By George Royal

For people who are suffering from insomnia, there is nothing so important as finding a good insomnia treatment. After all, the persistent inability to sleep, the constant fatigue, and the frustration of failing to get any rest night after night takes its toll. Fortunately, there are plenty of options available for people who suffer from insomnia, and an effective insomnia treatment can be found by those who need one.

The first thing to do when looking for an insomnia treatment is to look at insomnia prevention. Eliminating caffeine in the evening hours, exercising in the early evening, avoiding television and the internet near bed time, and getting to bed early are all excellent ways to prevent insomnia before it starts. And prevention is the best way to start treatment.

Probably the best-known insomnia treatment is the classic glass of warm milk. For as long as anyone can remember, when somebody has trouble falling asleep, someone has recommended a nice glass of warm milk. The reasons for its effectiveness are still not entirely understood, but warm milk does help people fall asleep. Though it will not necessarily help someone who is suffering from chronic insomnia, it will help people who just need a little something that will help them relax enough to get to sleep.

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When the insomnia is a little more stubborn, stronger methods may be necessary. There are several herbal insomnia treatments available and they can be very effective assistants when someone is having trouble falling asleep. The most common herbal treatments include ingredients such as lavender, chamomile, or valerian and they can be very effective when sleep will not come otherwise.

Another option for people who need help falling asleep is melatonin, a naturally-occurring hormone. This hormone is vital in regulating human sleep cycles and, when taken in pill form, it can help people get their insomnia under control and fall asleep when they need to fall asleep. And because it is a naturally occurring hormone in mammals, it is not as hazardous as some of the stronger insomnia treatments.

Unfortunately, some people do not respond to any of these methods and need a stronger insomnia treatment. Which means, of course, sleeping pills. Admittedly, sleeping pills are very effective. However, they also carry a risk of dependency and even addiction and should, therefore, be used sparingly. But, for people who are suffering from extreme, chronic insomnia, there is sometimes no other choice and sleeping pills are needed to finally get a good night's sleep. While it is not a method that should be taken lightly, serious insomnia sometimes require serious measures and sleeping pills are an extremely effective insomnia treatment.

Insomnia treatment is vital for people who want to start getting a good night's sleep again. And there are several treatment options available for people who are suffering from an inability to sleep, ranging from simple methods of prevention to the use of sleeping pills. But the best method is one created by sitting down with a doctor and putting together an insomnia treatment plan that tailor made for the person who is struggling with sleep.

Sleep HQ: your guide to sleep apnea and getting a good night's sleep.



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