

Insomnia

Insomnia (trouble falling asleep or staying asleep) is a common problem. It can cause daytime tiredness and sleepiness and difficulty paying attention at school or being alert at work.

Insomnia affects people of all ages. Insomnia can be **transient** (short-term) and related to a specific condition like stress or travel, or it can be a **chronic** (long-term) problem that persists for many months. The June 28, 2006, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about treatment of chronic insomnia in older adults. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the May 21, 2003, issue of *JAMA*.



POSSIBLE CAUSES OF INSOMNIA

- Persistent stress
- Relationship problems
- Use of stimulants such as caffeine, cocaine, and some diet drugs
- Alcohol consumption
- Shift work or keeping erratic hours
- Inactive lifestyle
- Environmental factors like noise and light
- Depression or anxiety disorders
- Medical problems including **sleep apnea** (waking up frequently during the night, severe snoring, and brief periods of not breathing)
- **Restless legs syndrome** (uncomfortable leg sensations at night that are relieved by walking, rubbing, or other movements that prevent sleeping)

SLEEP GUIDELINES

- Keep a regular schedule with a consistent bedtime.
- Use your bedroom mainly for sleep.
- Exercise regularly, but try to finish exercise at least 3 to 4 hours before going to bed.
- Avoid caffeine for at least 6 hours before going to bed.
- Avoid large meals close to bedtime.
- If you nap during the day, try to do so at the same time each day, and limit napping to an hour or less.

TREATMENT OF INSOMNIA

If you experience persistent insomnia, see your doctor. Depending on the cause of the insomnia, your doctor may prescribe various treatments ranging from psychiatric counseling to drug therapy.

Sources: National Sleep Foundation, American Insomnia Association, National Center on Sleep Disorders Research, American Academy of Sleep Medicine

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Sleep Foundation
www.sleepfoundation.org
- American Insomnia Association
www.americaninsomniaassociation.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on breathing problems during sleep was published in the June 13, 2001, issue.

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