

BEATING INSOMNIA

For many people, insomnia is a learned problem. Repeated nights spent worrying or tossing and turning in bed teaches the body to associate the bed with arousal and alertness, when instead we want the body to associate the bed with relaxation and drowsiness. In order to break this problem we need to help the body “relearn” to associate the bed with sleepiness. The steps below will do this. Read them carefully, follow them closely, and call the clinic if you have any questions. You can sleep better!

STEP 1: DO NOT GO TO BED UNTIL YOU ARE VERY DROWSY (NO MATTER WHAT TIME IT IS!).

Do not go to bed according to the clock. Instead, go to bed only when you are so drowsy you can barely stay awake. You might end up getting in bed long after your usual bed time if you do this, but that’s okay. With time, you will get drowsy earlier in the night.

STEP 2: IF YOU ARE AWAKE IN BED MORE THAN TWENTY MINUTES, GET OUT OF BED AND DO SOMETHING RELAXING.

This is very important! Remember that by lying in bed a long time awake, you are teaching your body to associate the bed with wakefulness. We want the opposite to happen, so you must leave the bed if you’re not sleeping. When you get out of bed, avoid doing activities that excite you or make you tense. Instead, do something relaxing.

STEP 3: WHEN YOU BEGIN TO FEEL DROWSY AGAIN, TRY GOING TO BED AGAIN.

If you again lie awake in bed for twenty minutes, it’s important to go back to Step 2 by getting out of bed. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 until you eventually fall asleep. When you start this program, you might need to repeat these steps several times until you fall asleep, but this will improve after 1 week for most people.

STEP 4: GET OUT OF BED AT THE SAME TIME EACH DAY.

No matter what time you fall asleep during the night, make sure to get up at about the same time each day (even weekends). Do not stay in bed more than 1 hour later than your usual waking time.

STEP 5: DO NOT NAP DURING THE DAY.

If you absolutely must nap, limit the nap to twenty minutes. You might want to set a timer to make sure you don’t sleep longer.

MOST IMPORTANTLY: HAVE PATIENCE!

Chronic insomnia doesn’t develop overnight and it doesn’t go away overnight. In fact, most people who follow these steps find their sleep gets worse before it gets better. However, in one to two weeks, you should notice significant improvement in your sleep if you follow these steps closely.

SWEET DREAMS!

From Robinson, P. and Reiter, J., Behavioral Consultation and Primary Care: A Guide to Integrating Services, Springer, 2007.