



Put insomnia to bed

Sleeping problems are common and can be caused by a variety of different factors. The medical term for sleep disturbances is insomnia and includes difficulty in getting to sleep, difficulty in staying asleep and not feeling refreshed in the morning. There are some simple things that you can do which may help – this is called sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene

For people with insomnia, the first step in improving sleep is putting into practice some simple sleep hygiene measures, or lifestyle and environmental changes that may help you sleep. Some examples are:

- Improve your sleep environment, for example by ensuring that the bed is comfortable and the bedroom warm, quiet and dark.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even after a poor night's sleep.
- Do not stay in bed if you are awake for more than 20 minutes; go to another room and do something relaxing.
- Be as active as possible during the day and spend time outdoors if possible.
- Avoid taking naps during the day, otherwise if you do nap, keep it to 20 minutes before 3pm.
- Try to wind down before attempting to go to sleep e.g. reading a book or magazine. Avoid playing computer games or working immediately before going to bed.
- Do not discuss or analyse problems in bed.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol, especially in the evening.
- Try to lose weight if you are overweight.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes every day (but at least three hours before bedtime).
- Reduce caffeine intake during the day and avoid caffeine-containing drinks such as tea, coffee, cola and energy drinks after midday.
- Avoid heavy meals or strenuous exercise in the evening.

If these interventions don't work, there are a range of psychological treatments and medications which effectively treat insomnia.