

**HOW TO OVERCOME INSOMNIA:
A KEY TO BETTER SLEEP
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Overcoming insomnia requires identifying attitudes and actions that contribute to sleeping problems and then confronting these cognitive and behavioral habits directly. Based on a meta-analysis of dozens of studies that have used various behavior-changing strategies to treat insomnia, research psychologists have found that most of these approaches improved sleep patterns and the improvements in sleep typically remained evident months later.

Wake up early. It is ironic that good sleep habits begin with a regular rising time in the morning. A regular wake-up time promotes a more stable circadian rhythm, which helps maintain better sleeping patterns at night. Even if you missed some sleep the night before, which may create a mild sleep deprivation, strive to maintain a regular wake-up time.

Avoid taking naps. Although napping may be restorative for those without sleeping problems, it often makes matters worse for someone who already has difficulty with sleep. If you have no difficulty sleeping at night, then don't worry about taking a nap. However, if you have difficulty staying asleep at night, then be careful about napping during the day.

Change your attitude. Do you think you should fall asleep immediately and wake up full of energy? Are you afraid your health is at risk? Identifying your beliefs and challenging them allows you to de-emphasize your sleep problems and reduce sleep-defeating anxiety.

Don't try too hard. Go to bed only when you're sleepy. If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing.

Cut back on time spent in bed. If you spend eight hours in bed but only sleep for six hours, go to bed two hours later than usual. This

creates a mild sleep deprivation but promotes deeper sleep. After a few weeks, gradually build up your sleep time.

Bring the bed under stimulus control. People with insomnia often use the bed for a variety of activities ranging from eating and drinking to studying to working on taxes. Psychologists usually advise that the bed be reserved for only two activities---and one of these is sleep.

Avoid consuming caffeine in foods and beverages. During the day, especially during the late afternoon and early evening, avoid caffeinated foods and beverages such as coffee, tea, sodas, and chocolate.

Avoid drinking alcohol in the evening. Although a glass of wine can facilitate relaxation and induce the onset of sleep, the effects of alcohol quickly wear off and disrupt your sleep cycle later on. Using alcohol to induce sleep often results in rebound wakefulness a few hours later.

Get some walking or aerobic exercise. Empirical studies of adults with sleep complaints found that a brisk walk or a low-impact aerobics session every couple of days could reduce falling-asleep time by half and could extend sleep by almost an hour. Exercise can help you sleep, but it should not be done right before bedtime. Try to exercise at least three hours before bedtime.

Turn off the television. It is hardly surprising that many people with insomnia spend the evening watching television in bed. Unless the evening news is what you want your dreams to become, consider turning off the television in the evening. Consider darkening your bedroom by minimizing glaring lights and loud sounds.

Consider something soothing to read.

Bedtime is not the time to work on tomorrow's assignment or business report, but choosing something soothing to read may be helpful in winding down before the final lights go out. Rather than reading material that is detailed, technical, or depressing, consider reading material that is uplifting, imaginative, or spiritual in focus.

Use bedtime rituals to make the transition.

Many people find that bedtime rituals help them make the transition from wakefulness to sleepiness. Bedtime rituals may include taking a warm bath, taking off makeup, drinking a cup of herbal tea, putting on pajamas, and so forth. To avoid worrying about things at night, some people find it helpful to lay out things for the next morning. This ritual might include laying out clothes, important papers, or even packing lunch for the next day.

Consider prayers of gratitude. Regardless of spiritual orientation, many people who sleep soundly find that bedtime is a good place for counting their blessings and saying gratitude prayers.

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