

Put Insomnia to Rest Using Naturopathic Medicine

By Sara Korsunsky BSc., N.D.

- Sleep difficulties are estimated to be the #1 health related problem in North America.
- Over 50% of adults report trouble sleeping at least a few nights of the week.
- We sleep an average of 6.9 hours per night, almost 1 hour less than a few decades ago!
- Lack of sleep leads to fatigue, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, shortened lifespan, depression, low immunity and is implicated in diabetes.

Insomnia is characterized by difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, and affects women ten times more often than men. Adequate sleep is necessary for the body to heal and for emotions to be processed. A lack of sleep puts you at a greater risk for anxiety, heart disease, infection, high blood sugar levels and obesity, and causes the body's stress hormones to become unbalanced.

Insomnia can be either short term or chronic. Short term insomnia is often a reaction to stress or change and may follow a traumatic event, illness, surgery, weather changes or traveling. Chronic insomnia is most often linked to anxiety and stress, and may become habitual, wherein a person knows that they will be unable to sleep and becomes focused on this, preventing the very thing that they desire most- to fall asleep. Pregnancy, menstruation and menopause are common times in a woman's life where insomnia is experienced due to discomfort and fluctuations in hormone levels.

The treatment of insomnia with sleeping pills has harmful side effects such as mental foginess, decreased short term memory and impaired physical ability which can all lead to accidents and injury. Sleeping medications lead to over 1000 overdose related deaths last year. Prescription medications do not treat the causes of insomnia and often lead to chemical addiction. They should only be used short term and not by those over 65 years old or with sleep apnea.

A Naturopathic approach to treating insomnia will include revealing the cause of insomnia, which is often multifactorial. It is important to rule out other medical problems such as hyperthyroidism, sleep apnea, and alcoholism and depression. The use of stimulants such as caffeine and sugar or medications may also be responsible, as may food sensitivities that are not traditionally allergenic but lead to digestive complaints. An inability of the body to adapt to stress called "adrenal fatigue" is often a culprit in insomnia and can be investigated with salivary hormone tests. Hormone imbalances such as elevated estrogen levels can also lead to sleep difficulty. Treatments will include proper sleep hygiene and routine, and an appropriate combination of nutrition, exercise, herbal medicine, acupuncture and homeopathic medicine.

Insomnia is a complex problem and needs to be treated as such, through careful evaluation of its causes and an integrative approach to healing. Sleep medications are short term, band-aid solutions to the problem with dangerous side effects. Naturopathic Doctors will assess all of your health concerns and offer you a personalized treatment plan using treatments that address the causes of insomnia. Supportive lifestyle and nutritional changes and gentle naturopathic remedies are effective ways to treat insomnia that have positive long term effects in all areas of your life, so that you can sleep well and rest easy that you are ensuring a healthy future.