

## Health Matters

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### Sweet Dreams

If my previous column on insomnia did not put you to sleep, hopefully this one will. As effective as sleeping pills are, there actually exists a better non-pharmacologic mouse trap. This is called CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy). CBT can have beneficial effects that last well beyond the end of treatment. It involves combinations of the following therapies:

- Cognitive therapy: Changing attitudes and beliefs that hinder your sleep
- Relaxation training: Relaxing your mind and body
- Sleep hygiene training: Correcting bad habits that contribute to poor sleep
- Sleep restriction: Severely limiting and then gradually increasing your time in bed
- Stimulus control: Going to bed only when sleepy, waking at the same time daily, leaving the bed when unable to fall asleep

These interventions can produce sustained reliable benefit in sleep patterns without having to depend on medications. CBT helps you change actions or thoughts that hurt your ability to sleep well. It helps you develop habits that promote a healthy pattern of sleep. There is very little training in medical school on sleep disorders and how insomnia can impact patient overall health and quality of life. Even though 35% of American adults reported difficulty sleeping and 10% considered their insomnia chronic or severe, only 5% of persons with chronic insomnia visited their physician specifically to discuss that problem. Not only are behavioral therapies at least as effective as sleeping pills but the benefit lasts longer. Obviously limiting the possibility of side effects and long-term dependence is desirable. These simple interventions should be the first line of treatment for insomnia before a doctor writes a prescription to help you sleep. CBT results in greater patient satisfaction in the long run and a higher number of normal sleepers. The idea is to learn about good sleep habits and improved behavior in the bedroom.

- Avoid caffeine after lunch. Avoid alcohol within 6 hours of bedtime. Avoid nicotine before bedtime
- Try to exercise daily but not within 4 hours of bedtime
- Avoid heavy evening meals. Avoid going to bed hungry
- Avoid taking naps
- Maintain consistent regular bedtime and awakening hours daily
- Keep the bedroom dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature
- Schedule regular relaxation time before bed
- Use earplugs if noise is a problem
- Provide daytime light at least 30 minutes in the morning

- Do not read, write, eat, watch TV, talk on the phone or use the bed for anything other than sex or sleep
- Avoid mentally stimulating or emotionally upsetting activities too close to bedtime
- Do not force yourself to sleep and if you're unable to fall asleep within 15-30 minutes do something relaxing and then return to bed

Lack of satisfactory sleep can have serious health consequences including higher rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension as well as behavior and learning disorders in kids. Insomnia is frequently associated with depression and can be a symptom of other medical, psychiatric and sleep disorders. Actually insomnia appears to be predictive of a number of other conditions including anxiety, alcohol dependence, drug dependence and even suicide. Not only are sleeping pills expensive but potentially addicting. The techniques above should be used more often as initial treatment for chronic insomnia.

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