



# Are you one of the 70% of Islanders that have one thing in common? A Struggle to Sleep

With the end of the winter in sight and the smell of spring in the air, will the lighter nights and longer days help islanders sleep more soundly at night?

Insomnia is big news at the moment with many public figures and celebrities coming clean about their ongoing sleep difficulties.

Let's have a closer look to see if a difference in the climate and the onset of spring will assist in our ability to get a good nights sleep.

## Mark Shields Explains

Are you tossing and turning at night for no apparent reason worrying about everything in your life all at the same time, watching the clock as the hours tick away?

Are you worried about how you will cope tomorrow?

These are some of many questions we ask ourselves during sleepless nights. It is known as insomnia and statistics suggest that you are not alone in the middle of the night even though you think you are.

The good news is although we will see in a moment that although many people suffer with sleep difficulties, things seem to get easier with the onset of spring.

This is because the brain sleep chemical melatonin is produced from a variety of sources one of them being serotonin. Serotonin is the brains happy chemical produced by the sun and through light.

It is understandable then that as the nights get lighter and the days get longer our serotonin production increases helping the natural production of melatonin.

### What is Insomnia

A staggering 70-80% of the general population is affected by insomnia in some way and 10% have chronic insomnia, a much longer term and serious disorder.

If you are female you surprisingly have 40% more chance of suffering with some type of insomnia than men are. This may be largely due to hormonal imbalance, pregnancy, and post natal issues and body changes.

### Different Categories of Insomnia

#### 1. Transient insomnia (Short Term)

Whereby insomnia is intermittent due perhaps changes in your sleep environment, the timing of your sleep or is caused by stress and anxiety. It can last from a matter of days to weeks.

#### 2. Acute insomnia (Medium Term)

This is the inability to consistently sleep well for a period of three weeks to six months.

#### 3. Chronic insomnia (Long Term)

This can last from months to years. This can be affected by other disorders or can be the primary cause.

### What are the main causes?

#### Stress

As we progress into this millennium the stresses and strains of everyday life are most definitely taking their toll on us. Our mental health can be affected by demanding work pressure, financial pressure and relationships which impact on our ability to relax and ultimately sleep.

Many sufferers complain about lying awake at night for hours worrying about what's happened during the day, or what they have to accomplish the following day. Others awake very early in the morning unable to return to sleep however hard they try.

### Common causes of insomnia:

- Hormonal Changes
- Natural aging
- Stress and Environment
- Parenthood
- Relationship Problems
- Work pressures
- Work/Home Life balance
- Anxiety and Depression
- Life changes
- Illness
- Pain

### What's The Answer?

#### Make an Appointment with your GP

Many times people mistake other common sleep disorders for insomnia. This is one reason it is important you visit your GP for a full physical if you have trouble sleeping.

#### Identify the Cause

List the reasons why you think you may be suffering from any type of sleep disorder. The GP will be able to carry out some simple tests and can work with you to help identify insomnia symptoms and the causes for your inability to sleep or stay asleep.

#### Top Big 5 Insomnia Busting Tips to help you get good nights sleep.

##### 1. Exercise

One of the greatest ways to overcome insomnia is to ensure you take regular exercise. The brain is therefore regularly releasing endorphins these are the body's natural opiates, and reduce stress and anxiety. In addition we are burning energy and fat which results in natural tiredness setting in. However, it is better to exercise at least four hours before you settle down for bed.

##### 2. Relaxing Techniques

Many people use relaxing CDS or read a book prior to bedtime. This is known as a distraction technique and focuses your mind away from any worries of the day. You can buy relaxation and hypnotherapy CDS which are excellent and have helped many of my clients. Deep Sleep by Glen Harold is in my opinion the best option out there.

##### 3. Bedtime routine & Environment

It is very important to establish a bedtime routine and stick to it. Many people start their routine with a warm night time drink such camomile or red bush tea and a relaxing bath with lavender oil which is a known herb to relax the body. They may read for a while before turning off the light at the same time every night.

##### 4. Caffeine

Caffeine can stay present in the body for up to forty hours after intake, therefore, a cup of coffee drunk at lunchtime can potentially impact the next 2 nights sleep. My advice to anyone suffering with insomnia is to give up caffeine altogether and switch to alternatives such as herbal teas which are caffeine free. Caffeine can be found in coffee, cola drinks, tea and chocolate.

##### 5. Food

Ensure you don't eat anything within four hours of going to bed. Food is the body's fuel and you don't want to be ready for take off just before bedtime. You should avoid sugar and refined carbohydrates like biscuits or cakes before bedtime which will raise your blood sugar level dramatically and have you bouncing off the ceiling.

### Conclusion

#### Accept you are not alone

Acceptance is a key emotion when de stressing. Take some comfort and accept you are not alone. Whilst you are lying the odds are that one of your neighbours is also suffering in exactly the same way. It is common. The more you fight it and the harder you try the more difficult it becomes. Reverse your thinking try to stay awake and see how long you can before you drop off.

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