

# SLEEPLESS IN *Jersey*

ARE YOU TOSSING AND TURNING IN BED FOR NO APPARENT REASON? WORRYING ABOUT EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE ALL AT THE SAME TIME? WATCHING THE CLOCK AS THE HOURS TICK AWAY? WONDERING HOW YOU WILL COPE TOMORROW?

**MARK SHIELDS** EXPLAINS INSOMNIA



**Y**OU are not alone if you are lying awake in the middle of the night, even though you think you are.

What is insomnia?

A staggering 70 to 80 per cent of the general population is affected by insomnia, and one cent have chronic insomnia, a much longer term and serious disorder.

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

There are different categories of insomnia:

\*Transient (short term) insomnia, in which the insomnia is intermittent, due perhaps to changes in your sleep environment, the timing of your sleep, or to stress and anxiety. It can last from a matter of days to weeks. The effects of transient insomnia are understandably sleepiness and impaired psychomotor performance that affects concentration.

\*Acute (medium term) insomnia: this is

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

\*Chronic (long-term) insomnia, which can last from months to years. This can be affected by other disorders or it can be the primary cause.

One of the main causes of insomnia is 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, that impact on our ability to relax and ultimately, on our ability to 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.

Other common causes of insomnia are hormonal changes, natural ageing, stress and environment, parenthood, relationship problems, work pressures, work/home life balance, anxiety and depression, life changes, illness and pain.

What's The Answer? In the first instance, make an appointment with your GP. Many times people mistake other common sleep disorders for insomnia. This is one reason why it is important you visit your GP for a full physical check-up if you have trouble sleeping.

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.

And here is a 'sleep success story'...

Jonathan works on shifts. He had sleep problems for years and his job didn't help with the irregular working hours. He lacked routine and was concerned about his weight, which was also suffering as a result of erratic shift work.

He first came to me about 6 months ago and I introduced him to some key strategies for conquering his insomnia, some of them listed below. In addition I used some slightly more detailed hypnosis and NLP techniques. That was coupled with teaching John self-hypnosis

and meditation techniques.

Within four weeks his sleep was better than it had been when he was a child. What was equally exciting was attacking his sleep problem, which naturally affected his metabolism. Now that he was giving up caffeine, and was sticking to a much more sensible diet, not eating after 6pm in the evening and eating breakfast everyday, he had bags more energy and felt great.

This inspired him to begin his exercise regime - and the rest is history.

He now sleeps much better, is far more relaxed and looks fantastic. He has achieved great success by losing nearly 3 stone in 6 months. This proves how important our sleep is to us and the dramatic effects it can have on all parts of our life and body if it is not looked after.

There are many ways to help relax your mind and body and some or all of these may work for you and essentially create a feeling of calm at bedtime that will be conducive to a great night's sleep. Sleep tight!

## Top Insomnia Busting Tips to help you get a good night's sleep

### Exercise

One of the greatest ways to overcome insomnia is to ensure you take regular exercise, so that the brain regularly releases 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.

### Relaxing Techniques

Many people use relaxing CDs or read a book before 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 that are excellent and have helped many of my clients. Deep Sleep by Glen Harold is in my opinion the best option out there.

### Bedtime routine

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 as camomile or redbush tea and a relaxing bath with lavender oil, which is a herb known to relax the body. They may read for a while before turning off the light at the same time every night.

### Bedroom Environment

Make sure that your bedroom is well ventilated so that there is plenty of fresh air circulating in the room. Also, peaceful colour schemes can aid relaxation so if you do suffer with sleeping disorders try decorating your room in calming colours. Spray a mist of fabric freshener on the pillow before you get in bed or you can purchase room or pillow sprays from many high street chemists.

### 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.

### 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 that will raise your blood sugar level dramatically and have you bouncing off the ceiling.

### Cigarettes & Alcohol

Avoid both of these completely before bedtime. They are both stimulants and trigger the body's defence systems that release adrenaline into the body. Nothing could be worse just before bed. In addition the liver will have finished processing the alcohol some hours later which results in almost guaranteed early morning waking and an inability to get back to sleep.

### Make a note

Be prepared for any night time worries and have a notepad by the bed so you can right any worries or 'to do's' for the following day. Close the book and forget about them till the morning.

### Accept you are not alone

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.

### Sleeping Tablets

Herbal and over the counter tablets such as Nytol can help for short-term sleep disruption. They can be purchased in chemists and may help to restore people to normal sleeping patterns.

Your GP may prescribe sleeping medication on prescription. They are very effective and simply work by slowing down the communication vehicles in the brain, so reducing stress and anxiety. The downside is people can become dependent on them and they can have side effects such as headaches and morning drowsiness.