



Insomnia Treatment

Treatment Options

Lifestyle changes can often help relieve acute (short-term) difficulty sleeping. These changes might make it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep. However, lifestyle changes alone cannot cure chronic (ongoing) insomnia.

The most effective treatment for chronic insomnia, or Insomnia Disorder, is a specific type of counseling called Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-i). It works by changing the thoughts and behaviors that maintain the cycle of insomnia.

Several medicines can also help you sleep in the short term and re-establish a regular sleep schedule. However, they cannot fix Insomnia Disorder, and if your insomnia is a side effect of another problem, it's also important to treat the underlying cause (if possible).

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-i)

CBT for Insomnia or CBT-i targets the thoughts and actions that can disrupt sleep. This therapy promotes more consolidated sleep by ensuring a good match between actual sleep duration and time spent in bed. Over time, the length of time spent in bed is increased until you get a full night of sleep.

CBT-i also targets unhelpful learned associations between the bed and bedroom environment, and wakefulness. CBT-i uses several methods to relieve the sense of desperation about sleeplessness that you can feel when you have struggled with insomnia for a long time.

CBT-i also includes training in relaxation strategies to reduce anxiety about sleep. These strategies help you better control your breathing, heart rate, muscles, and mood, and can reduce the "hyped up" feeling that keeps you from sleeping. Other strategies are used to challenge the unhelpful thoughts that have come from years of not sleeping well. For example, you may tell yourself that tomorrow will be ruined if you don't sleep tonight. Thoughts such as these only serve to ramp up the pressure. In CBT-i, you'll learn strategies to challenge thoughts like these that can help you turn down the volume on your sense of desperation.

CBT-i also includes strategies to tame the busy mind that seems to show up at the exact moment you get into bed.

CBT-i is often delivered in person, but is also effectively delivered using online courses as well. Online CBT-i courses, such as Path to Better Sleep, can be used on your own or with the support of your healthcare provider. No matter how you choose to engage with Path to Better Sleep, be sure to inform your provider of your use of these materials.



Path to *Better Sleep*

Fact Sheet

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Sleep Medication and Over the Counter Products

Prescription Medications

Many prescription medicines are used to treat insomnia. Some are meant for short-term use, while others are meant for longer use.

Talk to your doctor about the benefits and side effects of insomnia medicines. For example, although insomnia medications can help you fall asleep, they may also make you feel groggy in the morning.

Rare side effects of these medicines include sleep eating, sleep walking, or driving while asleep. If you have side effects from an insomnia medicine, or if it doesn't work well, tell your doctor. He or she might prescribe a different medicine.

Some insomnia medicines can be habit forming. Ask your doctor about the benefits and risks of insomnia medicines.

Over-the-counter Products

Some over-the-counter (OTC) products claim to treat insomnia. These products include melatonin, L-tryptophan supplements, and valerian teas or extracts. The Food and Drug Administration doesn't regulate "natural" products and some food supplements. Thus, the dose and purity of these substances can vary. How well these products work and how safe they are isn't well understood.

Some OTC products that contain antihistamines are sold as sleep aids. Although these products might make you sleepy, talk to your doctor before taking them. These medications pose risks for some people. Also, these products may not offer the best treatment for your insomnia. Your doctor can advise you whether these products will benefit you.