



# INSOMNIA

- **Around 1 in 3 people have mild insomnia sometimes.**
- **Many poor sleepers have developed poor sleep habits.**
- **For specialist help, cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia is best.**
- **In the long run, taking sleeping pills isn't effective.**
- **There are sleep specialists and clinics that can help.**

Note: All words that are underlined relate to topics in the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

## 1. What is insomnia?

Insomnia is said to be present when you regularly find it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep. It has several patterns. You may have trouble getting to sleep initially. Or even if you can fall asleep, you might not be able to stay asleep for as long as you would like. Also you may wake up during the night and not be able to go back to sleep for a long time. Many people have two of the above problems, or even all three. Because of these, you might feel tired during the day.

## 2. What causes insomnia?

Insomnia has many causes which can include:

- Some medicines and drugs, e.g. asthma or blood pressure medication, caffeine, alcohol or smoking
- Chronic pain and other uncomfortable illnesses
- Stress at work or in your personal life
- Depression
- A friend or loved one passing away
- Anxiety and worrying, including worrying about not getting enough sleep
- Another sleep problem (see [Ten Common Sleep Disorders](#))

Sometimes there is no clear cause for insomnia, in which case it is called primary insomnia.

## 3. How common is insomnia?

Most people have experienced insomnia symptoms at some time of their lives. At any given time around 10% of people have at least mild insomnia.

## 4. Who is at risk?

Older people with poor health have a higher risk. Also women have twice the rates compared to men. This may be related to higher rates of anxiety and depression, which can be associated with insomnia. Shiftworkers have a higher risk too.

In general the sleep tracker apps and devices will give you a good overview of how long you sleep but they can only tell you so much. You have to use the data to figure out what's working for you and what isn't. If you think there is a problem, regardless of what the sleep tracker data is telling you, talk to your GP.

## 5. How does it affect people?

You might feel that it's harder to focus and remember things. But most people think their memory is worse than it really is. The same goes for concentration. Your risk of a traffic accident or other injury may be higher (see [Drowsy Driving](#)). You may be more emotional and a lack of sleep can cause depressed mood. Some people feel sleepy during the day, but this can be caused by many things (see [Excessive Daytime Sleepiness](#)).



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## 6. How is it treated?

This depends on what is causing the insomnia.

- If poor sleep habits are the cause then these need to be improved (see [Good Sleep Habits](#)).
- If your sleep habits seem to be okay but you are still having problems then you may need more specialist help. Cognitive-behavioural therapy for insomnia has been shown to be more effective in the medium and long term than sleeping tablets. (See the information under the final three subheadings for treatment services.)
- Stress, depression and anxiety are best treated by specialists, but taking steps to improve your sleep can also help with these.
- Sometimes sleep specialists will suggest a sleep study to be sure they understand what may be causing the poor sleep and also check for sleep apnea.

## 7. What about sleeping pills?

If you only take them occasionally, sleeping pills can get you a good night's sleep. However if you take them often, you will get used to them and they will stop working as effectively. Also they can be habit-forming and it can then become difficult to stop taking them. See also [Herbal Remedies and Sleep](#).

## 8. Where and when should you seek help?

If you are having ongoing trouble sleeping, persistent problems with mood, restlessness in bed, severe snoring or waking unrefreshed, make sure that you go and see your doctor. Your GP can refer you to a sleep specialist or psychologist.

Insomnia treatment services in Australia are listed here in the Sleep Services Directory:

[www.sleep.org.au/information/sleep-services-directory](http://www.sleep.org.au/information/sleep-services-directory)

For information on over 60 different sleep related topics, written by professionals, visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au). The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.



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A national organisation devoted to education, advocacy and supporting research into sleep and its disorders.

Disclaimer - Information provided here is general in nature and should not be seen as a substitute for professional medical advice. Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

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