



Insomnia

Tossing and turning, staring at the ceiling, unable to fall asleep, do these sound familiar? Many have experienced the torment of insomnia.

What is insomnia?

Sleep is categorized into REM (rapid eye movement) sleep and stage 1 to 4 sleep (deep sleep). Children can often go from consciousness to stage 4 sleep quickly, then to REM sleep and return to stage 4 sleep. This cycle usually appears 3 to 4 times per night. Adults often experience a shorter stage 4 sleep while the duration of the other stages of sleep increases. Elderlies find it difficult to enter stage 4 sleep making deep sleep rare and despite in a state of slumber there is the feeling of "conscious sleep".

Insomnia can be divided into short term and long term. Short term insomnia is failure to sleep for several days and long term insomnia refers to the inability to sleep for 3 weeks or more. As well, insomnia is also separated into early phase insomnia (unable to fall asleep), mid phase insomnia (unable to maintain sleep state, frequently wandering between consciousness and unconsciousness) and late phase insomnia (early waking).

What causes insomnia?

Short term insomnia can be caused by stress, sleeping environment, time difference and physical illness. Long term insomnia can be caused by:

- Physiological:** Elderly
- Psychological:** mood disorder, schizophrenia, drug abuse
- Diseases:** primary sleep disorder, pain, arthritis, gastric reflux, chronic lung disease, hyperthyroidism, heart failure, renal failure, Parkinson's disease, etc.
- Drugs:** alcohol, nicotine, runny nose medicine, bronchodilators, thyroxine, steroids, anti-arrhythmia medicine, etc.
- Action, lifestyle:** poor sleep habits, over sleep, work shifts, time zone differences

Why treat insomnia?

Insomnia can bring loss to the society and its economics, statistics show that 40% of the population requests leave due to insomnia. Long term insomnia can also induce mood disorder and patients who suffer insomnia have thrice the chance of experiencing depression, twice the chance of experiencing anxiety disorder, eight times the chance of drug abuse and 50% chance of alcohol abuse. Insomnia can also affect the quality of life, increase the chance of accidents and hinder the work efficiency.

How to fall asleep?

- Adhere to the same window of time to wake up and fall asleep each day and night.
- Maintain the sleeping area dark, cool and quiet.
- Exercise in the afternoon so the body will feel tired.
- Do not drink or smoke at night.
- Do not drink coffee 6 hours before bedtime or exercise 3 hours before bedtime.
- Only engage in sleep or sexual intercourse on the bed, refrain from other activities such as reading.
- Sleep when sleepy. If you are unable to fall asleep within 20 minutes, then get up and engage yourself in activities that do not require excessive energy or concentration until you feel sleepy and return to bed.
- Under the supervision of a physician, you may use sleeping pills but if you have substance abuse, sleep apnea or are pregnant, you must consult a physician before using any medication.

In Hong Kong, is insomnia common?

1998 studies show that insomnia is very common, 9.3% of the population expressed difficulty in falling asleep, 8.9% of the population expressed inability to remain asleep, 7.3% of the population expressed early waking; on the whole, 18.5% of the population experienced insomnia, the result is indeed worrying.