

SLEEP HYGIENE-RELATED INSOMNIA: How to Manage it

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What is Sleep Hygiene-related Insomnia?

Sleep hygiene-related insomnia (SHRI) plagues approximately 1% to 2% of adolescents and adults according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM, 2014). SHRI can be described as a set of practical behaviors which are designed to foster, restore and maintain good sleep. Inadequate sleep hygiene which leads to insomnia is a defined disorder and is believed to be a contributing factor for many people, presenting either alone as a disorder in itself, or with other sleep disorders (e.g., circadian rhythm disorder, breathing related disorders—apnea, etc.)

The Importance of Sleep.

Sleep is one of the most important aspects of our daily living. Sleep restores our physical, emotional and psychological functioning. Adults need approximately eight hours of sleep per night while children need 9.5, and infants need 16 hours. Without consistent, adequate amounts of sleep, the body and brain can quickly become deficient of sleep leading to physical, mental and emotional fatigue. Most people with sleep disorders experience a wide range of symptoms and decreased quality of life. Some of these symptoms include glucose intolerance, increased blood pressure, increased inflammatory markers, higher evening cortisol levels, weight gain/obesity, increased risk of myocardial infarction, depression and cancer. People tend to spend more money on over-the-counter products (sleep aids, caffeine, other stimulants), and prescription medications for sleep. Workplace losses including absenteeism, and workplace accidents are increased; automobile and other vehicular or heavy duty equipment accidents are increased often leading to death.

The AASM (2014) identified more than 80 official sleep disorders in the International Classification of Sleep Disorders (ICSD-2) Second Edition. Many of these sleep disorders result in significant problems including psychological, morbidity (medical), mortality (death) and accidents associated with moderate to severe drowsiness. Therefore, anyone who believes there may be an underlying sleep disorder, it is essential to seek accurate diagnosis and treatment. For those who admit to poor sleep hygiene, here are some helpful steps to take to change behavior and/or environment. Even those who have been diagnosed with sleep disorders need to assess their sleep hygiene to ensure good hygiene because when good hygiene is not taking place, the quality of sleep will be diminished even with treatment otherwise. For example, just using a CPAP will not resolve problems if the television is blaring or the sleep schedule continues to be erratic, nor will taking sleep medications. Conversely, the best sleep hygiene ever will not, necessarily, correct a circadian rhythm disorder. Most of these sleep disorders are preventable and treatable. SHRI is both preventable and correctible.

STEPS TO TAKE

*Keep a consistent schedule: It is important to establish a regular sleep schedule that is doable and obtainable and will allow seven to nine hours of sleep for the average adult each night. This means planning to go to bed at the same time each night and getting up at the same time each morning.

*Create bedtime rituals. Each evening before bedtime, set aside one to two hours of time for bedtime ritual. These are series of activities that provide sleep cues, then consistently repeat those activities each night. The first part of the ritual activity involves ending challenging activities (e.g., discontinuing engaging in challenging tasks such as bills, homework, school assignments, arguments or conflicts, etc.). This also includes watching television, computer work cellphone use and videogames because of lights and stimulation associated with these electronic devices. It may be helpful to create a To Do list if tasks or problems are unresolved so that they can be completed the next day. Writing down thoughts can clear them from the mind and help come up with resolutions as well.

The next part of the ritual involves 20 to 30 minutes of relaxation. These activities include reading, listening to relaxing (not stimulating) music, taking a warm bath or shower, sipping hot herbal (unsweetened or with honey) tea, yoga, meditation, deep breathing, prayer, etc. It may be helpful to dim the lights at this time as well.

Avoiding caffeine, alcohol, and other stimulants in the evening will be helpful in getting a good night's sleep. Many people are unaware of the negative effects of alcohol, Marijuana and other drugs on sleep; however, they can greatly reduce the quality of sleep.

As indicated throughout this article, it is essential to get a good night's sleep on a regular basis. If you have tried these steps and still are not sleeping, you may need to consult with a medical or mental health professional to rule out a sleep disorder.