

Insomnia

Insomnia is a common sleep disorder. It is defined as an inability to go to sleep, waking up too early, or feeling unrested after sleep for at least three nights a week for at least three months. Chronic (long-term) insomnia makes it difficult to accomplish routine tasks like going to work or school and taking care of yourself. Insomnia can lead to or contribute to the development of other health problems, such as depression, heart disease, and stroke.

Q: Who gets insomnia?

A: More than one in four women in the United States experience insomnia, compared with fewer than one in five men. In one study, women of all ages reported worse sleep quality than men, including taking longer to fall asleep, sleeping for shorter periods of time, and feeling sleepier when awake.

Older women are at a higher risk of insomnia. Other people at risk for insomnia include those who:

- Have a lot of stress
- Have depression or other mental health conditions
- Work nights or have an irregular sleep schedule, such as shift workers
- Travel long distances with time changes, such as air travelers
- Have certain medical conditions, like sleep apnea, asthma, and fibromyalgia

Q: What are the symptoms of insomnia?

A: The most common symptom of insomnia is difficulty sleeping — either going to sleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early. If you have insomnia, you may

- Lie awake for a long time without going to sleep
- Wake up during the night and find it difficult to go back to sleep
- Not feel rested when you wake up

Lack of sleep may cause other symptoms during the daytime. For example, you may wake up feeling tired, and you may have low energy during the day. It can also cause you to feel anxious, depressed, or irritable, and you may have a hard time concentrating or remembering things.

Q: How does insomnia affect women's health?

A: Insomnia can cause you to feel tired, anxious, or irritable in the short term. Over time, lack of sleep may increase your risk for more serious problems, including

- Accidents
- Health problems, including diabetes and high blood pressure
- Increased risk for falls, especially in older women

Women who have long-term insomnia may be more at risk than men with long-term insomnia for mood problems, heart disease and stroke, and obesity.

Q: How is insomnia treated?

A: If your insomnia is caused by a short-term change in your sleep/wake schedule, such as with jet lag, your sleep schedule will probably return to normal on its own.

Chronic or long-term insomnia can be treated with steps you can try at home to sleep better, cognitive behavioral therapy, and prescription medicines.

If insomnia is a symptom or side effect of another health problem (called secondary insomnia), your doctor may recommend treating the other health problem at the same time. When the other health problem is treated, secondary insomnia often goes away on its own.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have symptoms of insomnia, and ask about the best ways to treat insomnia.

For more information...

For more information about insomnia, call the OWH Helpline at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

National Center on Sleep Disorders Research, NHLBI, NIH

301-592-8573 • www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/org/ncsdr

American Academy of Sleep Medicine – Sleep Education

630-737-9700 • www.sleepeducation.org

National Sleep Foundation

703-243-1697 • www.sleep.org

The Office on Women's Health is grateful for the medical review in 2016 by

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Content last updated: November 30, 2017.

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