

MCLA Health Services

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Self Care Sheet

Insomnia

Insomnia means not sleeping, trouble sleeping or feeling like you are not getting enough sleep. Insomnia can last a few days to several months or it can become a more chronic problem if it lasts more than 6 months. Insomnia can take the form of difficulty falling asleep, waking up during the night and having difficulty falling back to sleep, sleeping so lightly to be easily awakened or waking up too early in the morning and not being able to fall back to sleep. Side effects of insomnia include daytime sleepiness, irritability (feeling tense, moody and easily upset), trouble concentrating, decreased academic performance and depression. The most common cause is stress. Other causes can include depression, too much alcohol or caffeine before bedtime, environmental factors like noise and light, varying sleep schedule, chronic pain and certain medications.

Home Care and Prevention

- ⇒ Keep a regular sleep schedule by going to bed and getting up at the same times each day. Napping during the day interferes with sleeping well at night. Too little sleep at the wrong time or pulling an all nighter will also impact normal rhythms. Some people need even more than 8 hours of sleep a night to feel rested.
- ⇒ Have a soothing bedtime routine: listen to relaxing music or a relaxation exercise. Drink a cup of herbal tea like chamomile or "Sleepy Time" tea. Don't fall asleep with books or papers in the bed or your cell phone at your pillow.
- ⇒ Avoid caffeine 3-5 hours before bedtime.
- ⇒ Avoid alcohol even though it causes sleepiness, it can cause nighttime awakenings.
- ⇒ Turn off computers and cell phones 2 hours before going to sleep.
- ⇒ Be sure your room at bedtime is calm, cool, dark and quiet. Turn alarm clocks away from your bed. May need to use ear plugs and or eye masks.
- ⇒ Exercise regularly but complete your workout within 3 hours of going to bed.
- ⇒ Get exposed to sunlight early in the day.
- ⇒ If you can't fall asleep right away (after 30 minutes) get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy.

When does insomnia need help and additional treatment?

- ⇒ If the basic preventive measures are not working.
- ⇒ If your quality of life is affected.
- ⇒ If your insomnia is associated with depression and thoughts of suicide.
- ⇒ If symptoms have lasted over 3 months.
- ⇒ If you have concerns about other sleep disorders. Has someone reported that you snore loudly, stop breathing for short periods at night or kick and move your legs and or arms while sleeping?
- ⇒ If you never feel rested and alert during the day and you become irritable, experience mood swings and decreased memory.

Follow up at Health Services for further evaluation and treatment. If stress and depression are concerns schedule an appointment at Counseling Services.