



## "Psychology Works" Fact Sheet: Insomnia

### What is insomnia?

Insomnia means a person has difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep during the night or wakes up tired in the morning. At least 10% of the adult population suffer from chronic insomnia and even more experience occasional sleep disturbances.

Common causes of insomnia include stress, anxiety, depression, pain, and stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine. Poor sleep habits and irregular sleep schedules can also contribute. Sometimes, the fear of not sleeping and trying too hard to sleep is enough to create a vicious cycle that keeps someone awake.

Insomnia is a serious problem. It causes daytime fatigue, impaired attention and concentration, reduced enjoyment of relationships, increased risk of depression, decreased productivity, unneeded suffering and significant use of costly health-care services.

### What psychological approaches work in treating primary insomnia?

Behavioural treatment helps you change your sleep habits and regulate the sleep schedule (i.e. what to do when you can't sleep, when to go to bed and when to get up).

Cognitive therapy helps you control the excessive preoccupation and worry concerning sleep.

Relaxation techniques reduce bedtime mental and physical tension.

Good sleep hygiene is important to ensure a good night's sleep (i.e. cutting down on caffeine or alcohol at bedtime, avoiding light and noise, increasing exercise).

### How effective are psychological methods of treating insomnia?

Research demonstrates that 70% to 80% of people with insomnia benefit significantly from short-term (4 to 6 weeks) sleep-focused psychological treatments.

Psychological approaches are often as effective as sleep medications, produce more durable improvements in sleep patterns and are often less costly. Treatment is also effective in reducing the use of sleep medications which can often interfere with alertness and motor coordination and cause dependency.

**You can consult with a registered psychologist** to find out if psychological interventions might be of help to you. Provincial, territorial and some municipal associations of psychology often maintain referral services. For the names and coordinates of provincial and territorial associations of psychology, go to <http://www.cpa.ca/public/whatisapsychologist/PTassociations/>.



*This fact sheet has been prepared for the Canadian Psychological Association by Dr. Charles Morin, Université Laval.*

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the *Psychology Works* Fact Sheets: [factsheets@cpa.ca](mailto:factsheets@cpa.ca)

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