

# Tips to Combat Sleep Difficulties

**Shepherd Center neurorehabilitation psychologists offer insight on dealing with insomnia.**



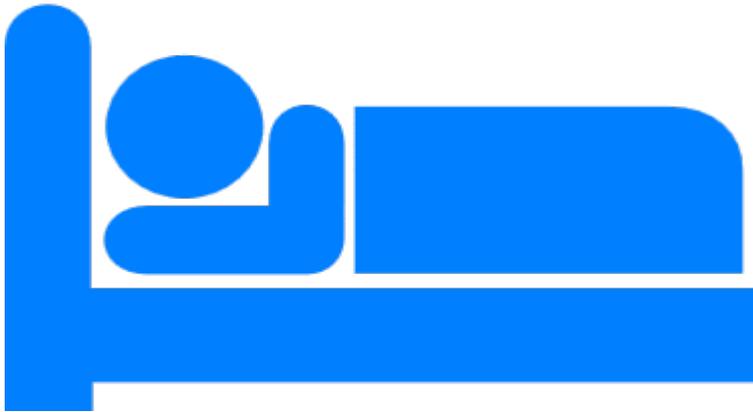
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# One in three people have difficulty sleeping. Here's how to know if you have insomnia:

- **Do you experience persistent dissatisfaction with sleep quality or amount?**
- **Do you notice one or more of the following?**
  - **Difficulty initiating sleep**
  - **Difficulty maintaining sleep (frequent awakenings or difficulty falling back to sleep after awakening)**
  - **Early morning awakening and inability to fall back to sleep**
- **Does your lack of sleep cause impairment in functioning?**
- **Does it happen at least three nights per week for at least three months?**
- **Could it be due to sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, substance or medication use, or other mental health diagnosis?**





While physical or biological reasons may trigger insomnia, the solution typically requires psychological and behavioral changes to get back on track.

## Sleep Hygiene Tips



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# Timing



- **Set up a sleep schedule:**
  - **Go to bed and get up at the same time every day of the week regardless of how much sleep you had.**
  - **Avoid taking naps during the daytime, regardless of how sleepy you may feel.**



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# Teaching your Body to Sleep

- Create a wind-down routine to let the body know it's time to sleep.
  - For example, take a bath, brush teeth, read, practice breathing or do relaxation exercises.
  - Turn off electronic devices at least one hour before bed; consider music.
- Restrict the amount of time spent in bed awake and get up at the same time each day regardless of how little you may have slept. In time, your body will adjust to the schedule you set.
- If unable to sleep after 15 to 25 minutes, get out of bed (if safe) and do something quiet like folding laundry or flipping through a magazine until sleepy, then return to bed. You may need to do this several times.



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# Your Environment Should Be:



- **Comfortable in temperature and bedding**
- **As dark as possible; consider a night light**
- **Quiet; consider ear plugs**
- **Soothing**
  - **Improve sleep ambience with simple uncluttered space, favorite calming colors, water fountains, white noise machine and aromatherapy.**



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# Other Habits

- Do exercise, but make sure it is two to three hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine four to six hours before bedtime.
- Avoid nicotine near bedtime and when waking up in the middle of the night.
- Don't go to bed hungry or full. Eat dinner at least three hours before bedtime, and consider a light snack an hour before bed.
- Reduce liquids in the evening, and stop drinking after 7 p.m., if possible.
- Be cautious of alcohol, which can make you feel groggy but wake you up later in the night.



# Preparing the Mind for Sleep



- Avoid mentally stimulating activities before going to bed (e.g., using electronic devices, watching action show/movie, etc.).
- Begin clearing your mind a couple of hours before bed.
  - Write down worry thoughts.
  - Create a to-do list for the next day. Practice using diaphragmatic breathing, biofeedback relaxation or guided imagery.
- Help the brain transition its state.
  - Listen to music without words.
  - Pray or invoke feelings of gratitude for specific things in your life.
  - Try relaxation exercises.
  - Practice focus meditation techniques.



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**Regardless of where you begin in making changes, don't delay making improvements to your sleep.**

Short-term difficulties, such as moodiness, difficulty concentrating and challenges at work, can turn into clinical depression, decreased work productivity, and risk of serious medical problems, such as hypertension and heart attacks.



Left unattended, insomnia can lead to a decreased quality of life.



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# Author Bios

- **Urszula Klich, Ph.D.**, has nearly 20 years of clinical experience in the area of health psychology. She has developed specialized techniques for managing pain, such as Mindfulness-Based Biofeedback. She is committed to helping people bridge the gap between their current way of living and their potential. Through her extensive work with people dealing with complex medical problems, she has cultivated a treatment philosophy centered on fostering each individual's healing power to improve physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Dr. Klich wants you to know that all people have the ability to improve their wellbeing by tapping into their natural healing power.

For free relaxation exercises or to learn more about the science and everyday practice of Mindfulness-Based Biofeedback, you may visit Dr. Klich's website [MyMindfulWayofLife.com](http://MyMindfulWayofLife.com) or follow MyMindfulWayofLife [on Facebook](#). Guided visualization exercise can be found on [CDBaby.com](http://CDBaby.com) or [downloaded on iTunes](#).

- **Asma Ali, Psy.D.**, is a clinical psychologist who has specialized training in the assessment and treatment of acute and chronic pain. Dr. Ali's training has also included a focus in neuropsychology and rehabilitation. She has experience in providing holistic care in collaboration with multidisciplinary teams to patients and their families who have experienced traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and who also suffer from various complex medical conditions, in addition to acute and chronic pain conditions.



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# More Resources

- To learn more about Shepherd Center, visit [shepherd.org](http://shepherd.org).
- More information about neurorehabilitation psychology services at Shepherd Center is available [here](#).
- To learn more about Shepherd Pain Institute, visit [shepherdpaininstitute.org](http://shepherdpaininstitute.org).



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