

Insomnia affects most of us at one time or another. For some it may mean an inability to fall asleep easily, for others it may mean frequent waking, restless sleep, waking early in the morning, or dream-disturbed sleep. As our society gets busier and busier, the cause may be an inability to stop thinking or worrying, or physical causes such as too much heat somewhere in the body or inappropriate foods.

Sometimes insomnia is temporary and secondary to another problem. Once the underlying cause is solved, such as pain or a specific stressful situation, the patient will sleep soundly.

From a Chinese Medicine perspective, the practitioner will question the patient in-depth about sleep patterns. They will want to know what time you wake throughout the night, if you have sweats, and if you have disturbing dreams, or if you've ever suffered from major blood loss, among other symptoms.

Treatment may focus on clearing heat from the body or a particular organ. It may involve "tonifying" an organ system, such as tonifying the digestive system so it makes the appropriate volume of blood. If stress is part of the problem, the treatment will focus on calming the mind.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, in addition to acupuncture, try drinking at least two to three quarts of water per day, and more if you drink dehydrating substances such as coffee or black tea. Stay off your computer in the evening, because it stimulates the brain. Avoid greasy and spicy food, particularly at night. If you get to a point in the evening your energy flags, don't push through it. Pushing yourself into using "false energy" is one of the major causes of insomnia and leads to Chronic Fatigue.

Try to eat and sleep at the same times every day. Above all, the body likes routine. This is particularly important if you are under severe stress, but is usually the first thing to go. If you wake to an alarm clock, you are probably not getting enough sleep. Try going to bed early enough that you wake before your alarm goes off.

Moderate exercise is a great stress-reducer and helps your body function properly. Getting full-spectrum light into your retinas during the day helps produce melatonin for sleep.

According to Traditional Chinese Medical wisdom, the best sleep position is lying on the right side with the legs slightly bent. The right arm is bent and resting in front of the pillow, and the left arm rests on the left thigh. Your practitioner will have additional suggestions based on your particular symptoms.

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