

IMPROVING YOUR SLEEP

Insomnia is one of the most common conditions with which people struggle. There are many varieties of insomnia, and, believe it or not, there are different reasons behind each type and different ways you can help yourself depending on the type of insomnia affecting you.

Chinese medical theory recognizes insomnia manifesting in a variety of ways. Acupuncture is excellent at improving sleep, especially when received on a regular basis, and has been proven to increase nocturnal melatonin secretion.¹ An acupuncture treatment plan and/or Chinese herbal medicine will be suggested to you based on the type of insomnia you suffer from and how chronic and severe it is.

Insomnia may manifest in one or more of the following ways for each individual:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep
- Restlessness
- Waking briefly repeatedly but falling back easily
- Waking up particularly between 1–3 am with difficulty falling back
- Restlessness while feeling hot and/or experiencing night sweats
- Waking up too early

Any of the above sleep difficulties may co-manifest with stress, anxiety, depression and/or racing thoughts, or may simply manifest on their own.

Regardless of which type(s) of insomnia you struggle with, the following recommendations are helpful, if not crucial, to improving your ability to sleep:

- Avoid the use of televisions and computers and exposure to bright light at least one hour before bedtime. Bright light prevents the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps to maintain biological rhythms of the sleep–wake cycle.
- Use caffeine moderately. Discontinue the use of caffeine after 12:00 pm, and beware particularly of decaffeinated beverages in the evening. Decaf coffee and tea do contain low levels of caffeine, and this can be enough for those who are caffeine-sensitive to be unable to fall asleep.
- Maintain the same sleeping schedule on weekdays and weekends.
- Make your bedroom dark, quiet and a comfortable temperature.
- Keep your bedroom a space only for sleep, sex and getting dressed.
- Finish eating at least 2–3 hours before bedtime, or if you do eat within two hours of bedtime, make sure it is only a light snack.
- Exercising regularly improves sleep but is stimulating, so avoid it within a few hours before bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol close to bedtime, as it disrupts sleep.

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¹ Spence et al. "Acupuncture Increases Nocturnal Melatonin Secretion and Reduces Insomnia and Anxiety: A Preliminary Report." *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*. 16:19–28, February 2004. <http://neuro.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/16/1/19>