

What then should I do to help my insomnia?

No matter what the cause of your insomnia, it's important to get on a good behavior program—one that pays attention to periods of relaxation. I suggest three steps:

- **First**, set your bedtime and your wake-up time according to the number of hours of sleep you are getting currently. For example, if you are sleeping only five hours a night (even though you usually plan to spend eight hours in bed), set your sleep time for that amount. Then gradually increase the amount of time allotted for sleep by 15 minutes or so every few nights. The idea is to "squeeze out" the middle of the nighttime awakening and gradually increase the amount of sleep you will get during the night.
- **Second**, spend some time "winding down." A person with insomnia needs a "buffer zone," a period of time to allow the activating processes in the brain to wind down to allow the alerting mechanisms to decrease their activity so that the sleep systems can take over. I suggest that you start winding down two hours before bedtime. Stop all work and end phone calls to family and friends, as often they are activating. Watching television is all right in the evening. However, an hour before bed, I recommend reading or listening to music.
- **Finally**, focus on conditioning yourself for different sleep behavior. Insomnia is painful for people—it can take control of their lives. When someone suffering from insomnia walks into their bedroom, they often feel anxious, uncomfortable and tense, as they know from their experience that they might spend the night tossing and turning. They need to set up a situation so that they like going to their bedroom. The bedroom should be visually pleasing and very comfortable. One should use the bedroom only for sleep, sex, and changing clothes, pleasant activities, and if awake in the night should leave the bed and bedroom and spend "unpleasant" times awake in another room. "Waking" activities such as working on the computer, talking with one's partner, talking on the phone and watching TV should take place out of the bedroom.

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