

Insomnia – The Most Prevalent Form of Sleep Disorder

Insomnia, a most common sleep disorder, affects about one third of the American population and is classified two different ways. It can be classified by how long it lasts. Transient insomnia lasts for only a few days, short term lasts for a few weeks and chronic lasts for more than three weeks. The other way insomnia is classified is by its source. The main two classifications of this sleep disorder by source are primary and secondary.

Transient insomnia is experienced by most people at some time throughout their lives. It can be caused by stress such as worrying about the first day school or an illness in the family. Sometimes this sleep disorder occurs due to a disruption of their circadian cycle, which is a persons natural sleep cycle, caused by jet lag or a shift change at work. Transient insomnia goes away once the stress issue has passed. Short term insomnia is often caused by similar stressors as transient insomnia. If the sufferer of this sleep disorder cannot break the cycle of poor sleep, it often develops into chronic insomnia.

Primary insomnia develops without any obvious cause. Sometimes it starts as early as infancy. Often it is the result of high metabolic rates or an overactive nervous system.

Secondary insomnia is the direct result of another cause. This sleep disorder can come from illness, medication, drugs or alcohol. Addressing the underlying cause of secondary insomnia often gives the sufferer relief. For example, if arthritis pain keeps you from sleeping, then treating the arthritis is the best way to cope with the sleep disorder.

Insomnia is not a single disorder. It is a general symptom and could have many potential causes. In order to qualify as a sleep disorder, insomnia has to meet three specific requirements. First, the person has to experience poor sleep in general, or have a problem falling or staying asleep. Second, if given the proper sleep environment and an adequate opportunity to sleep, the problem still occurs. Third, the result of the poor sleep causes some type of impairment while awake. Examples of an impairment are; fatigue, body aches and pains, inability to concentrate, mood changes, lack of energy, poor concentration, or developing an unnatural amount of worry about sleep.

Often insomnia is treated with medication, such as sleeping pills. These can be prescription medication or bought over the counter.

However, there are several other methods of treatment for this sleep disorder. Behavioral treatments include meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, visualization, biofeedback, sleep hygiene, cognitive behavioral therapy and reconditioning sleep restriction. These methods are often very successful.

Some sufferers of this sleep disorder choose holistic, or alternative, treatment. This method involves the use of herbal supplements which are not usually FDA approved. Others seek acupuncture as a way to relieve their insomnia. Passive body heating, which is the use of hot baths, is another method used.

Understanding this sleep disorder is the first step to breaking the cycle of insomnia.