Glimpse into insomnia

Lying in bed, exhausted but wide eyed. Tossing and turning. Waking at 4am and not returning to sleep. Rising in the morning feeling exhausted and unrefreshed.

Whichever way it is that you are effected, being unable to sleep properly is a horrendous experience for everyone.
And believe it or not, chronic fatigue and insomnia can coexist!

Ironically, I have tried to write this post several times, and have been too tired and brain foggy to think about it properly, so have put it off!



Insomnia…why can't it start in the morning?

There can be several reasons why we can be so exhausted, yet fail to sleep.



A **noisy mind** at bed time is probably the main culprit behind most people's insomnia. I have a lot on my mind at the moment, and it definitely does keep me awake. It is ironic, you spend all day thinking about issues going on, and then resign yourself to some comfort and rest in bed, and the clogs just turn louder!

“I want to sleep, I really do, but my brain won’t stop talking to itself!!”

Medications can cause sleep disturbances. Insomnia is a possible side effect of a medication I take for postural hypotension, for example. I also have definitely noticed more vivid dreams since starting the medication that I take for brain fog and fatigue. So it is a catch 22. Take the medication for certain symptoms, and risk other detrimental effects developing. At the moment, I will persevere with the medications, as hopefully they are doing more good to my health, and I plan to improve my sleep by other means.

Being unwell is obviously another reason for bad sleep. I am often quite uncomfortable lying in bed, with sore joints, stomach pains or head aches. When I have been in a state of thyrotoxicosis, I have been so wired because of the high levels of thyroid hormone in my system (the controller of the pace of all bodily processes), that I have been lucky to get to sleep by 2 or 3am, only to wake by 7 or 8am.

There is also the issue of not expending a lot of physical energy during the day due to illness, which then interferes with sleep.

On another note, if you suffer from insomnia, you should be aware of any disorders which could be behind it, such as breathing problems or restless leg syndrome. Some conditions can be impacting your ability to sleep, but causing great damage to your body. So if insomnia is an ongoing issue, before trying techniques to improve it, check in with a doctor to just make sure there is not something deeper that needs to be dealt with.

“Dear 3am, we have to stop meeting like this. I would much rather sleep with you.”

These circumstances have combined, and I have now found myself in quite **a bad sleep routine**. Despite being extremely tired by mid afternoon, and going to bed by 8 or 9 o’clock, I often lie awake, sometimes well into the morning hours. This means that my usual 6 to 8am wake up has turned into 9 or 10am, or later, and there continues the vicious cycle. This is also the plight of my fellow shift workers, where you can force your body to reset several times a week!

What can I do to get some sleep?!



I am definitely in need of a sleep makeover! I have been coming up with strategies to use to hopefully improve my sleep routine, and I thought you might like to try some out too.

1. I am currently trying to break the vicious cycle insomnia causes by setting an alarm for the morning, so hopefully my body clock will start to reset, and encourage me to feel more sleepy earlier in the night. Combining this with opening the curtains soon after waking to reset the biological clock for the new day will assist in improving the sleep cycle.

2. I have often used sleep vitamins. I find them very helpful, and everyone I have recommended them to have also found them effective. I particularly like Nature's Own Sleep Ezy, which contains a blend of natural ingredients that have a sedative and relaxing effect. If you have medical conditions or take medication, make sure to check with your doctor and pharmacist before using these tablets.

3. Drinking a warm drink, particularly milk, can have a soothing effect. If you are dairy free like me, try calming teas with ingredients such as chamomile, peppermint, catnip, lavender, anise or fennel. Just make sure that you don't drink so much that you are needing to get out of bed to visit the bathroom an hour later! Do not go to bed hungry, as this will make you uncomfortable and restless, but do not be too full

either.



4. Take a warm bath. This can relax you, relieve some tension, ease out the aching joints, and make you sleepy. Adding bath salts, or 1 cup of Epsom salts and 1 cup of baking soda, can further assist the relaxation process.

5. Book in for a massage in the afternoon, or if you're lucky and have a generous partner or family member, beg, bribe or flatter your way into a pre bed massage! Using relaxing scents in creams, or dabbing some aromatherapy oils on your skin or pillow can also assist. Lavender in particular is great for this.

6. Avoid stressful situations prior to bedtime. Don't go to bed with to do lists floating around your mind. Have paper and pen next to the bed if needed, so that you can jot thoughts down, let them go and deal with them in the morning.

7. Peaceful music and sounds playing near the bed is one of the most effective things I have found. I use apps on my phone, such as "Sleep stream 2." I also use yoga music, and other soothing music styles, and sounds, such as rain. It is amazing how this simple tool can make your brain a little quieter, your body a little more relaxed, and then you find yourself easing into sleep. Make sure it isn't too loud or enthusiastic, as this will have the opposite effect.

8. Try deep breathing, or meditation. Slow, deep breaths. Breathe by pushing out your belly, then your chest, then let

your tummy fall, then your chest.

9. In our day, it is near impossible to tear ourselves away from TV, phone or computer screens. However, anything with bright lights is going to effect your sleep pattern, by overexciting the brain, if you use them within an hour of bed. Turn them all off, and pick up a book, which is another way to relax, calm the noisy mind, and ready yourself for sleep. I particularly find listening to an audio book very helpful. Set it on snooze, so that it turns off once you are asleep, and you will often find that you are so lost in the story, that you don't even notice drifting off to sleep.



10. Make sure your sleeping area is set up to be as dark and quiet as possible. Turn off all the little lights that often remain on with computers, TVs and the like. Hang curtains or blinds that will keep street and car lights out. Also keep in mind to deal with things that may frustrate you once you are in bed, before you climb under the sheets. Over the past few weeks, I have had multiple pesky night time visitors in the form of mosquitoes! They are so noisy as soon as you turn that light off and close your eyes! Make sure your room is clear of anything that is going to dive bomb you and make noise while you attempt to sleep. Make sure fans are quiet, and doors aren't banging. Also, ensure your room is not too cold, and not too hot.

11. Communicate with your partner to try to accommodate the best strategy for you both to get a good sleep. This might mean putting two single doonas on if there is always a fight over the bed sheets, or getting a bigger sized bed if you are both “starfish” sleepers! It might also mean setting some ground rules: cuddles while you’re settling in, but your own space when sleep is in order! Trying to remove your arm which is caught under 90kgs of body, is probably not conducive to sleep for either of you!
On the other hand, sleep might be unattainable without a good spooning!



12. Getting enough hours of sleep is crucial, but a factor that is often forgotten is *when* to sleep. Adults below 45 years of age, should be falling asleep between 9pm and midnight. People older than 45 years, often find sleeping before 9pm helps their energy. Even when getting 8 hours of sleep in a night , it is not going to effective if you get it between 2 and 10am (I know this well!!).

13. Sometimes, when you have been lying in bed for hours with no success, as hard as it is, getting up and walking around can help. It breaks up that torturous feeling of thinking about the torturous feeling of insomnia and counting the painful minutes dragging on, and can often make you feel sleepy.

“Let her sleep for when she wakes, she will move mountains.”
While you are trying out these techniques and still have bad nights, make sure to look after yourself well the next day.

Drink plenty of water (start the day off with two glasses of water as close to waking as possible!), eat breakfast, eat regularly but do not over eat, do not over do it with caffeine or unhealthy foods, eat whole foods and foods rich in iron.
It has been shown that napping during the day can have great benefits to your health. A nap less than 45 minutes can make you feel ready to get back to the day. A nap of 90 minutes can include all the stages of the sleep cycle, which can refresh your whole body, and even make up for lost sleep the night before. It is harder to get going after this length of nap though, due to the sleep stages involved.



I know how gruesome it feels to have insomnia. We must persevere though! Let’s try these techniques, and bounce ideas and advice back to each other.
Remember to make your environment as suitable for sleep as possible, eliminate any stimulation or frustrations, choose a soothing technique that is good for you, acknowledge those noisy thoughts and send them out of your mind, and relax.

Happy dreams! Goodnight!

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