

Stress-Induced Insomnia Is a Brutal Cycle

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Lack of sleep caused by stress is a combination that can literally kill you. Relaxation and sleep are two things that can truly make a difference in how your body and mind react to stress. Without those two elements, you run the risk of slowing down or shutting down.

It's hard to determine which needs to be dealt with and fixed first – the stress or the insomnia, but unless at least one is fixed, they will both get worse. The effects of stress on your body and mind can slow your productivity and make your life much less enjoyable.

Stress can be fixed if you have a commitment to seeing it through. After the stress factors are reduced, sleep should come more easily.

Causes of Stress-Induced Insomnia

Too much stress in your life may cause insomnia and vice-versa. When you try to get through the day without getting enough sleep the night before, everything you have to do is magnified and your stress levels can soar.

Sleep times vary from one person to another, but most adults should get 7 to 8 hours per night to keep up energy levels, keep up mental acuity to be able to get through the work day and maintain a good quality of life.

You may experience a short-term bout of acute insomnia that lasts for only a few days. A stressful event in your life might trigger this type of insomnia, but if you experience it for more than a month, the problem could be caused by too much stress on a daily basis.

Insomnia might also be induced by certain medications or a medical condition you're dealing with. Insomnia is defined as a sleep disorder that causes you to have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep.

You may wake up too early – without being able to get back to sleep -- and feel tired when it's time to start the day. If you think you are suffering from chronic insomnia, take note of what the causes might be.

Stress-induced insomnia may result in worrying or serious concerns about your health, finances, work or loved ones. You may also experience stress-induced insomnia if you've just gone through a divorce or lost a loved one.

Other causes of insomnia might include a change in your circadian rhythms that is disrupting your body's temperature or metabolism. An irregular sleep schedule could also cause bouts with insomnia – or an uncomfortable bed or sleep environment.

Eating too much just before bedtime can also cause disruptions in sleep. It could also trigger heartburn, acid reflux and other issues that may keep you awake. Anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression may also be causes for insomnia.

Symptoms and Risks of Stress-Induced Insomnia

Dealing with the symptoms of stress-induced insomnia can make you feel disconnected from most everyone and everything. You're not as mentally alert and you might also be irritable and anxious.

Depression may set in and cause other problems such as fatigue and inability to focus on anything. You may never feel well-rested, even when you think you get a good night's sleep.

Obsession over the sleep you're missing is a symptom that can keep you from doing well at other tasks and you may have trouble paying attention – which can cause accidents and errors.

Mood swings are also symptoms of stress-induced insomnia. Tension headaches and aches in the shoulders and neck are caused by stress and can keep you from getting a good night's sleep without help from medications or relaxation techniques.

Socializing may not seem like an insomnia issue, but if you're finding it difficult to be around people, you may experience more stress by not being able to keep up with socializing as you once did.

Some gastrointestinal symptoms might creep into your life too, such as diarrhea or constipation. This, too, can lead to more serious health problems. Anyone who suffers from chronic stress-induced insomnia is more at risk for developing chronic diseases and other health complications.

Heart disease, diabetes, premature aging and even an early death are just a few of the issues that could be caused by stress-induced insomnia. This type of insomnia can also cause people to eat more and gain weight, drink or take drugs and exercise less.

Those are all actions that cause negative consequences to our health. One of the most common risks of long-term, stress-induced insomnia is catching the common cold. You become resistant to the cortisol that acts as an immunity booster and you're more susceptible to viruses.

Weight gain can also be a health issue related to stress-induced insomnia. When stress hormones are released into the body, your preference for the unhealthy foods containing starch, sugar and fat is increased.

If you haven't had enough sleep, you get a double dose of the stress hormones which can lead to binge eating. Seniors suffering from stress-induced insomnia may experience a slower healing process from medical procedures or surgeries.

Heart disease caused by stress and insomnia can encourage plaque in the blood vessel walls – a key factor in heart disease. Depression is also a component in long-term, stress-induced insomnia. It's triggered by the brain's neurotransmitter systems gone wrong – out of balance.

Digestive problems can also be exacerbated by stress-induced insomnia. Ulcers, Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and ulcerative colitis are all inflammatory health issues caused by changes in the balance of bacteria in the stomach.

If you don't sleep well at night, you may be tense and feel back, shoulder and neck pain when you get up in the morning. Stress during the day at work or home may make the pain worse or cause inflammation that makes it more difficult to heal.

Treatments for Stress-Induced Insomnia

Within the medical realm, there are treatments for stress-induced insomnia that include corticosteroids, alpha blockers, statins, ACE inhibitors and glucosamine/chondroitin. If you've tried relaxation techniques, but just can't seem to get a good night's sleep you may need to resort to meds.

But, there are other techniques that can also help and won't be as harmful to your body. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT-1) is one way to solve stress-induced insomnia. This treatment helps you get rid of the negative thoughts that bombard you at night and keep you from restful sleep.

As a cognitive treatment, CBT-1 helps you identify and change negative thoughts and eliminate worry. The behavioral part of the treatment encourages good sleep habits and avoiding those negative habits that may keep you awake.

Relaxation techniques that include biofeedback, breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation are gentle ways to get rid of anxiety at bedtime and help you relax. Stimulus control therapy is another method that trains your body and mind to be consistent at bedtime.

For example, you might avoid daytime naps, set a specific time to wake up and leave the bedroom after you've tried unsuccessfully to go to sleep for twenty minutes – and returning when you become sleepy. Also, it's recommended that you only use the bed for sleep and sex, not watching television, working or reading.

Light therapy can be used if you're falling asleep too soon and awaking too early. The light is used to set back your internal clock. Sleep restriction therapy is used to make you feel more tired at night until you get in a

habit of staying in bed for the appropriate amount of time you need for sleep.

Paradoxical intention is a method you can use to lessen the anxiety you feel about trying to get to sleep by getting you to try and stay awake after you go to bed rather than trying to go to sleep.

Sleep aids that you can purchase over-the-counter and that aren't as powerful as most prescription drugs contain antihistamines that may make you drowsy. It's recommended that you don't use these sleep aids on a regular basis as they may affect you during the day with dizziness, cognitive issues and difficulty urinating.

Your doctor may begin the search to see how to help stress-induced insomnia with a physical exam. A blood test may be in order to see if you have thyroid problems. You may also need to keep a journal of your sleep habits over a couple of weeks' time.

Sleep studies are done if nothing seems to help your insomnia or control your stress that's keeping you awake at night. You'll spend the night at a sleep center and during that time, your breathing, heart and brain waves and eye and body movement will be monitored.

Other than the above treatments, certain relaxation techniques before bedtime are helpful to relax yourself and get ready for sleep. Yoga stretching and breathing has been a tried and true method for decades to relieve stress.

Meditation is also a good idea to keep your mind away from stressful thoughts. Listening to relaxation music and/or guides to relaxation may also be helpful to lull you into a good night's sleep.

Home remedies for insomnia haven't been completely proven for effectiveness, but you may want to research to discover if one might be good for you. Melatonin is an over-the-counter medication that is herbal and considered safe to use, but not on a regular basis.

Acupuncture may also help reduce stress and promote a good night's sleep. Be sure to find an experienced practitioner. Valerian is also herbal based and acts as a mild sedative.

Prevention Techniques for Stress-Induced Insomnia

After you get into the viscous cycle of stress-induced insomnia, you may have a long road to travel before you get back to a normal sleep pattern. The best thing you can do for yourself and your health is to prevent it from happening.

One thing you can do if you suspect that the stress-related insomnia is caused by work is to set boundaries such as letting you spend time with family or relaxing in the evening without answering calls or emails.

Don't get roped into so many requests that you can't handle them all without acute stress. Just say no to the ones that aren't that critical. Don't check your email every few minutes. Designate a time during the day and let it go in the evening so you're distractions are lessened.

Schedule the things you like to do in the evening hours. Other requests from friends or organization should be secondary to what means the most to you and how you can unwind in the evening.

When you are at home and relaxing before bedtime, put your cellphone away. Take time to relax or converse without distractions – including the television. After you watch a show, turn off the television and avoid watching it just before bedtime or especially in the bedroom after you go to bed.

News is stressful to watch any time during the day, so limit what you watch that makes you stressful to 30 minutes or less per day. The same with your computer – don't have it on and blinking at you when you're trying to relax.

During the daytime hours it's important to stay active. Exercise helps to reduce stress so it doesn't bother you at bedtime and promotes a great

night's sleep. You'll also want to plan the bedtime hours to be consistent from one day to the next – even on weekends when possible.

Limit caffeine or alcohol and kick the smoking habit, if necessary. These substances can make your nerves jittery at bedtime and keep you from getting the required amount of sleep.

A bedtime ritual can help over time to relax your body and mind and ready it for a good night's sleep. A warm bath, soft music or a few minutes of reading can go a long way to calm nerves and make you sleepy.

If you have a child or teen suffering from stress-induced insomnia, it's important that you get to the root cause as soon as possible to prevent depression and/or any other health condition that may develop.

When insomnia makes it difficult for you to function during the daytime hours, it's best to see your doctor. A sleep disorder of any time may need special treatment other than the type you purchase over the counter.

You should be as committed to getting the full amount of restful sleep you need as much as you are to a healthy diet and exercise to keep your body in shape. You could suffer a poor quality of life for an extended period of time unless you get the stress – and the sleep problems under control.



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