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trouble sleeping?

SAFE SOLUTIONS FOR INSOMNIA

If you're not getting enough sleep, you've got company. Americans' use of sleeping pills has jumped nearly 60 percent since 2000. While close to 42 million prescriptions for sleep aids were filled in 2005, these popular pills fail to address the underlying causes of insomnia.

In fact, many drugs can actually worsen sleep quality (increasing light sleep while decreasing the time spent in deep sleep). Plus they have significant side effects, ranging from amnesia, anxiety, dry mouth, a "drugged" feeling, diarrhea, dizziness, flu-like symptoms, inflammation of the sinuses and throat, loss of appetite, muscle pain, nausea, rash, palpitations, and urinary tract infection. The incidence of drugged drivers has been growing steadily for the past five years—putting us all at risk.

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

The causes of sleeplessness range far beyond the considerable stress of our 24/7 lifestyles. Aging, allergies, sleep apnea, arthritis, breathing problems, cardiovascular disease, chronic reflux, depression, diabetes, exposure to heavy metals, fibromyalgia, chronic headaches, hormonal changes, hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, obstructive pulmonary disease, restless legs, urinary problems, and vitamin deficiencies are only a few reasons for insomnia. But insomnia's results are often the same: accidents, difficulty coping, emotional instability, fatigue, foggy thinking, and irritability.

Long-term sleep deprivation is linked to several chronic health conditions, a weakened immune system, and even weight

gain—making a holistic, rather than a magic bullet, approach wise. Regular sleep habits, exercise early in the day, acupressure, massage, aromatherapy (using essential oils of chamomile, lavender, neroli, or ylang-ylang), hydrotherapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy can be helpful.

EAT TO SLEEP

Since sleep disorders are often linked to food allergies, pay special attention to what you eat. Avoid mucus-producing dairy and bananas to see if you notice a difference. Add more essential fatty acids from salmon, sardines, walnuts, and flaxseed, which can help decrease allergic reactions as well as inflammatory conditions like arthritis.

In the evening, dine lightly on poultry, soy, tuna, whole grains, and unsweetened yogurt with live cultures—all rich in tryptophan, which stimulates sleep-conductive neurotransmitters. B vitamins are essential for

a good night's sleep, so sprinkle a little brewer's yeast in your favorite green foods drink or on your dinner salad. Cut down on caffeine, found in chocolate, colas and other soft drinks, medications, and black and green teas as well as coffee.

TRY SUPPLEMENTS

Those who struggle to sleep have found several supplements helpful. Calcium (500 mg in the evening) is a natural sedative, as is magnesium (take at least 250 mg with calcium). Vitamin B6 (50 mg daily) supports sleep-promoting neurotransmitters, while B12 deficiency, common among seniors, contributes to sleeplessness: Take 1,500 micrograms of B12 in capsules or 400 mg of sublingual tabs daily. The hormone

melatonin (as little as 0.3 to 0.5 mg one hour before bedtime) helps promote sleep, especially for insomnia due to tinnitus, but it's best used short term or under professional supervision.

Several herbs with reported sleep-inducing properties include hops (*Humulus lupulus*), passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*), and skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*). Also enjoy a relaxing chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*) tea in the evening.

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) has long been used by the sleep deprived; however, a small percentage of people taking this herb may experience a stimulating, rather than a sedating, effect. Recent research concludes that "sleep improvements with a valerian-herbs combination are associated with

improved quality of life." A combination of valerian and lemon balm is effective for restless children who have trouble falling asleep or tend to wake up at night. Trevor Holly Cates, ND, at the Santa Barbara Center for Natural Medicine, says "the homeopathic medicine **Calms Forté 4 Kids** helps with anxiety, irritability, night terrors, and restlessness in children."

Other homeopathic medicines (available over the counter in 6x, 12x, 6C, 12C, or 30C potencies) are also useful. Try **Arsenicum album** if you're anxious, restless, or a perfectionist who awakens in the early hours. **Coffea cruda** (minuscule homeopathic doses of coffee) is advised for insomniacs who find themselves awake at 3 a.m. with a racing mind. ■■■