

Rest and Recharge: Tips and Tricks to Fix Your Sleep

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Disclosures



Dr. Mills has no conflicts of interest or financial relationships to disclose

Dr. Mills is a clinical psychologist who works at Nebraska Medicine, primarily in cancer care

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Objectives

- Learn what causes and maintains sleep difficulties
- Learn how short-term sleep difficulties can develop into long-term insomnia
- Learn how to improve sleep through:
 - Good sleep hygiene
 - Stress management skills
 - Cognitive skills

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Insomnia

Difficulty getting to sleep (sleep onset)

Difficulty staying asleep (sleep maintenance)

Difficulty getting back to sleep after waking

Insomnia disorder – any of the above, plus:

- Impairment in daily life
- Distress about poor sleep

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What Can Cause Insomnia?

- Most common
 - Unknown cause (25%)
 - Family stressors (23%) – separation, grief
 - Health stressors (23%) – pain, illness, restless legs
 - Work / school (17%) – stress, night shifts
 - Distress (12%) – depression, anxiety, substance use

Bastien et al., 2004

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What Can Cause Insomnia?

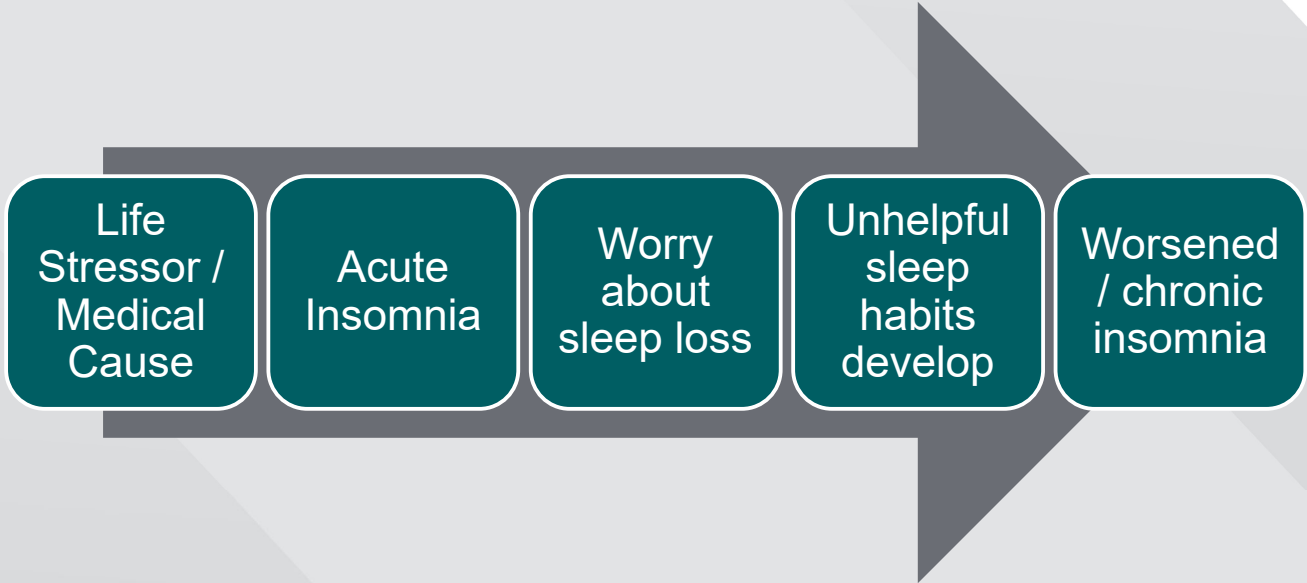
- Biological risk factors:
 - Older age, female sex, genetic history, overactive stress system, hormonal changes
- Situational:
 - New life stressors
 - Medical / health changes (pain, medication side effect, discomfort, frequent waking d/t health issue, OSA)

Morin et al., 2015

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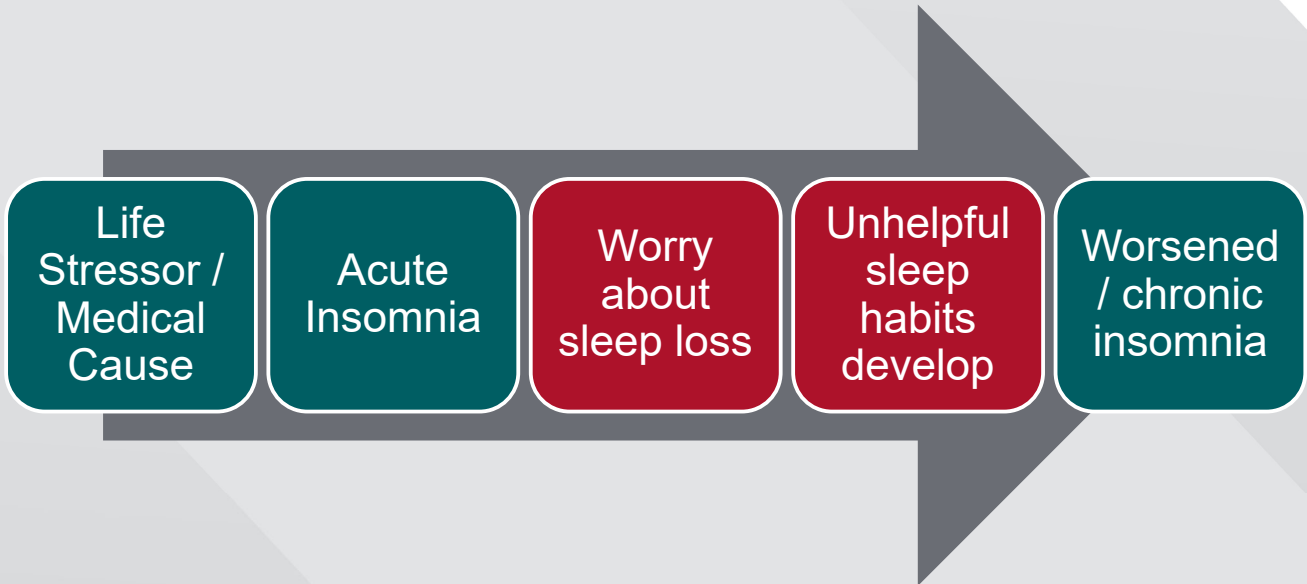
Development of Insomnia



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Development of Insomnia



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Worry About Sleep

- “I’m dreading bedtime”
- “I must get 8 hours”
- “I won’t be able to function tomorrow”
- “I only slept four hours, so I’m going to feel miserable”

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Worry About Other Stuff

- “What if my cancer comes back”
- “Why do my kids never call?”
- “What if work never gets better?”
- “What if the backyard tree falls during this storm?”

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Worry Keeps You Awake

- Worry / stress / anxiety result in activation of the “fight or flight” (survival) system
- Brain literally believes you are in danger at the current moment
- Sleeping is ill-advised when you are in danger

Morin et al., 2015

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Improving Stress At Nighttime

- Triage worries – save them for tomorrow, make a to-do list, fix what you can before bed
- Practice neutralizing negative thoughts
- Engage in relaxation
- Give yourself something to listen to

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Examples of Neutral Sleep Thoughts



- “The more I focus on calming myself, the better chance I will sleep”
- “I may be tired tomorrow, but I will be okay”
- “It takes time for sleep to improve”
- “Even if I have a bad night, it can teach me what works and what doesn’t”

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Insomnia and Daytime Functioning



- The effects of sleep loss are often subtle & inconsistent
- It’s possible that changes attributed to sleep loss are related to **stress** instead
- **In other words, stress could be just as disruptive to health and performance than sleep loss**

Katz & McHorney, 2002

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Sleep Behaviors / Sleep “Hygiene”

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Unhelpful Sleep Behaviors

Tonight:

- Tossing and turning indefinitely
- “Clock watching” and mental math
- Thinking about how miserable tomorrow will be
- Thinking about stressors or things you have to do

Mitchell et al., 2012

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Unhelpful Sleep Behaviors



Any changes you make to your routine or behaviors to *make up for last night* will only make it harder for you to sleep *tonight*

Mitchell et al., 2012

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Unhelpful Sleep Behaviors



Tomorrow:

- Sleeping in
 - Increasing caffeine or using substances to try to sleep (ie alcohol)
 - Taking naps*
 - Going to bed early
-
- *Take naps if they will improve your daily QOL

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Helpful Sleep Behaviors

Tonight:

- Tossing and turning indefinitely
 - Instead – get out of bed if you are not feeling sleepy
- “Clock watching” and mental math
 - Instead – Turn clock away if you can’t help it
- Thinking about how miserable tomorrow will be
 - Instead – Remind yourself you will be okay
- Thinking about stressors or things you have to do
 - Instead – Write that stuff down and promise to do it soon

Mitchell et al., 2012

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Helpful Sleep Behaviors

Only use your bed for sleep or restful activities

Try to avoid TV / screens, heavy exercise, heavy meals before bed

- Exercise earlier, light snacks are okay

Engage in relaxation or listen to audiobook, podcast, etc

- Helps keep your mind off of worries

Mitchell et al., 2012

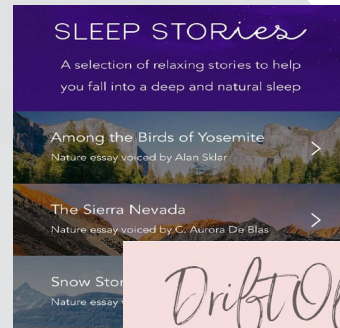
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Mobile App Resources

Sleep stories (long stories with calming audio)

Sleep podcasts (pleasant ramblings on mildly interesting topics)

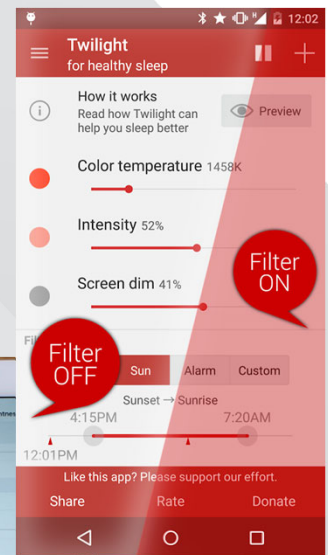
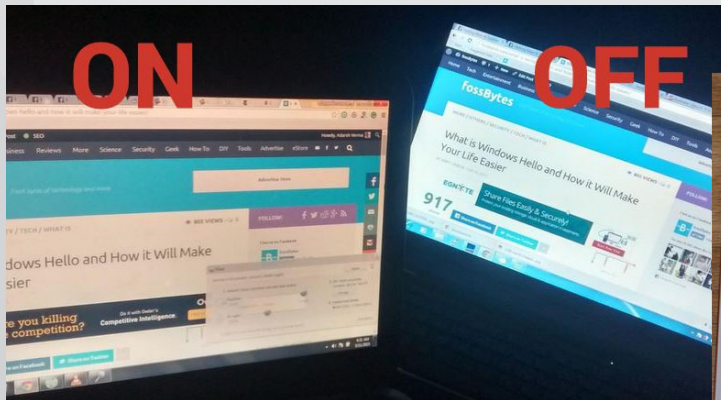
White noise?



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Mobile App Resources

Blue light filter? (f.lux, Twilight, Night Light on Androids, Night Shift on iPhone)



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Alcohol & Sleep



Do alcohol “Nightcaps” help with sleep?

- Alcohol is a depressant and helps with falling asleep. **HOWEVER:**
 - It disrupts your sleep cycles
 - It results in lighter, more disrupted sleep
 - It causes withdrawal effects (up to 4 hours) → lighter sleep and more awakenings

Recommendation: Limit alcohol use to 1-2 drinks in the evening, ensuring that you do not consume any alcohol at least 2 hours before bedtime.

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Sleep Medication



Disclaimer:

- I am not a prescriber.
- I am not trained in medications

Prescription (Ambien, trazodone)



Over the counter / off-label – Check the ingredients!

- Benadryl, Benadryl and more Benadryl (diphenhydramine)
- Melatonin, valerian root, nighttime teas
- Unisom / doxylamine succinate

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Take Home Points

Maintain the same routines

Neutralize negative thoughts about sleep- it will be okay

Make small changes and stick with them for several days

Engage in relaxation or listen to something distracting

Consider medication support to improve your QOL

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