

SLEEP BETTER

Many patients with chronic pain have trouble sleeping. The sleep deprivation may also lead to an increase in the chronic pain. The cycle of increasing pain and sleep deprivation perpetuates itself. Unless something is done to break the cycle, it will spiral on out of control. There are medications that can be prescribed to help people with chronic pain to fall asleep and stay asleep. There are also many herbal supplements and over-the-counter remedies which can accomplish a similar result. However, normal sleep patterns cannot be obtained by medications and dietary supplements alone.

Many of the people with chronic pain, who have sleep disorders, have very poor sleep behavior. Most of these people had poor sleep behavior prior to developing a chronic pain syndrome. There is no information to link these as cause and effect. However, as long as there is poor sleep behavior, it is unlikely that the person with chronic pain will ever be able to restore normal sleep patterns, even with the aid of medications.

This will be an outline of how to shift your sleep behavior to a pattern that allows for better sleep. First and most important, you must have a bedtime. You must go to bed, to go to sleep, at the same time every night. You must also have a waking time. You must get up out of bed at the same time every day. This is very important. Related to this is the timing of that sleep cycle. Human beings are created to be awake during the day and asleep at night. In order to achieve normal hormonal variation from day to night within the body, this must be the sleep cycle that is maintained. There have been many studies that demonstrate that people who work at night and sleep during the day, have shorter life spans and suffer from more chronic and serious illnesses than people who have normal nighttime sleep. This includes people with chronic pain. For purposes of fulfilling this first and most important sleep behavior objective, you can assume that a good bed time is somewhere between 10 pm and midnight. A good awakening time is somewhere between 6 am and 8 am. Your sleep goal is ideally an 8 to 9 hour sleep cycle. Shorter times are acceptable, but do not shoot for a sleep cycle of less than 6 hours.

The second important sleep behavior is to sleep in bed. Get your television out of your bedroom. Do not eat in bed, read in bed, or try to finish up work in bed.

Relaxation is also very important to being able to fall asleep. Relaxation is something that some people do not know how to do. If you are a person that does not know how to relax, we can get some relaxation therapy for you. When you lie in bed you must relax your body and your mind. Soft music may help. A wind down ritual, or relaxation ritual, prior to bedtime may also help you to relax.

Contrary to popular belief, alcohol does not aid with sleep. In fact, alcohol actually interferes with a normal sleep cycle. Alcohol destroys sleep mechanisms, making it more difficult to both fall asleep and stay asleep. If you drink alcohol daily, or more days than not, nothing else is likely to help you sleep, until you dry out! If you drink alcohol, do not drink to excess and do not drink within 2 to 3 hours of entering your sleep cycle.

Regular exercise is also very important for developing a good sleep cycle. The exercise is best done during the day, morning is okay, but evening is generally to be avoided especially within 2 to 3 hours of the time that you enter your sleep cycle. There are no particular recommendations for certain exercises, just that you should engage in some physical exercise compatible with your other health conditions. This exercise should be daily or at least every other day.

And finally, do not nap! You may believe that if you are not getting enough sleep at night, you have to nap during the day. However, it is those daytime naps that may be contributing to your nighttime insomnia. In order to develop the normal hormonal variations within your body, that allow you to develop stable and regular sleep patterns, you must not have a daytime sleep cycle that may continue to disrupt your body's day/night cycle.

In the beginning, medications or nutritional supplements may be used to help establish better sleep cycles. However, there is no chemical component to a long term solution for insomnia. Developing good sleep behavior is the best alternative for solving the problem of insomnia in the long term.

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