The insomnia cycle

How a few bad nights turn into a lasting problem.

Most insomnia starts for a good reason: stress, illness, a new baby, a change of routine. It carries on because of what we do, quite understandably, to cope with it.



What keeps it going

- **Too much time in bed.** More hours in bed spreads sleep thinner and makes it lighter and more broken.
- **Irregular hours.** Lie-ins and naps weaken sleep pressure and confuse the body clock.
- **Bed linked with being awake.** After enough bad nights, getting into bed is enough to make you alert.
- **Effort.** Trying hard to sleep keeps you awake.
- **Daytime worry.** Watching for tiredness and blaming everything on sleep keeps the pressure on.

What breaks it

1. A fixed getting-up time, seven days a week.
2. Going to bed only when sleepy.
3. Getting out of bed when you cannot sleep.
4. A shorter, more regular time in bed.
5. A wind-down routine and a plan for a busy mind.
6. Easing off the struggle.

Treatment

This approach is called CBT for insomnia. It is the recommended first treatment for long-term sleep problems and works for most people within a few weeks.

My notes and questions

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Sleep habits checklist

The everyday things that help sleep or get in its way.

Name _____ Date _____

Tick what you already do. Circle one or two to work on. Good habits alone rarely cure insomnia, but they give the other strategies a fair chance.

During the day

- [ ] I get up at the same time every day
- [ ] I get outside in daylight in the morning
- [ ] I move my body most days
- [ ] I avoid naps, or keep them under 20 minutes before 3pm
- [ ] I stop caffeine by early afternoon

In the evening

- [ ] I finish eating two to three hours before bed
- [ ] I keep alcohol low and not close to bedtime
- [ ] I avoid nicotine near bedtime
- [ ] I wind down for the last hour
- [ ] I dim the lights and put screens away
- [ ] I deal with tomorrow's worries earlier in the evening

In the bedroom

- [ ] My room is dark, quiet and cool
- [ ] My bed is comfortable
- [ ] I use my bed only for sleep and sex
- [ ] My phone charges outside the room, or out of reach
- [ ] The clock is turned away from me

At night

- [ ] I go to bed only when sleepy
- [ ] If I am awake for a long time, I get up
- [ ] I do not check the time in the night

The one or two changes I will make this week

What might make that hard, and how I will handle it

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