

New study finds that treating insomnia is far less costly than ignoring it

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Insomniacs are advised to get early treatment for their sleep disorder not only so they can start feeling better faster, but it can also save them and their employers money in the long run. A study published in the March 1st issue of the journal *Sleep* finds that, as opposed to treating insomnia, failure to treat it is much more costly.

The study, conducted by Ronald J. Ozminkowski, PhD, director of health and productivity research at Thomson Medstat in Ann Arbor, Mich., and James K. Walsh, PhD, director of the Sleep Medicine and Research Center in Chesterfield, Mo., addresses the cost of untreated insomnia for over 210,000 patients.

The authors discovered that, in contrast to many other disorders, insomnia is relatively inexpensive to treat. Even the most expensive medications cost less than \$200 per year for the typical insomnia patient, noted the authors, adding that the major costs of insomnia occur before diagnosis is made and before treatment begins.

In comparison, the authors found that untreated insomnia led to \$924 to \$1,143 more in medical expenditures, depending on the patients' age, for just the six months before treatment began.

In the U.S., employers pay for about 80 percent of all health expenditures for the employees and dependents covered in their health plans. Employers also pay for all of the lost absenteeism via lower worker productivity. For a typical employee with untreated insomnia,

these costs would be about \$1,059 for just the six months prior to treatment, said the authors.

Insomnia leads to a substantial increase in health care expenditures and absenteeism from work. About 10 percent of the adults in the U.S. (i.e., about 25 to 30 million people) have chronic insomnia, so the cost of failure to treat is huge for the U.S. population.

"Our study suggests that it costs far less to treat insomnia than to ignore it," said Ozminkowski, the study's lead author. "Untreated insomnia affects individuals' health, quality of life, and job performance — and increases their use of healthcare services substantially."

"Approximately 25 to 30 million Americans have chronic insomnia, so this issue has huge implications for employers, health plans, government insurance programs and individuals," said Walsh, co-author of the study.

Insomnia is a common sleep complaint that occurs when you have one or more of these problems:

- You have a hard time initiating sleep.
- You struggle to maintain sleep, waking up frequently during the night.
- You tend to wake up too early and are unable to go back to sleep.
- Your sleep is non-restorative or of a poor quality.

About 30 percent of adults suffer from some form of insomnia. It is more common among elderly people and women. Some medical conditions cause insomnia, or it may be a side effect of a medication.

Those who think they might have insomnia, or another sleep disorder, are urged to discuss their problem with their primary care physician, who will issue a referral to a sleep specialist.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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