

Insomnia: Changing your bedtime habits could help relieve insomnia

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Many people sleep better when they are on holiday and wish that they could sleep as well all the time. But according to the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG), it is not only being free of daily worries that can make a difference to sleep. Good bedtime habits can help people to sleep well all year round. Medication provides short-term relief at best.

In information published www.informedhealthonline.org on the Institute reports about what bedtime habits could help, how well relaxation techniques work, how sleep changes throughout life and that adults do not generally need eight hours sleep a night.

Sleep medication is used less nowadays

About 1 out of every 5 adults in industrial countries have problems sleeping at some point in their lives. In order to provide reliable information on this issue, the Institute analysed scientific studies that cover a wide range of research on sleep and insomnia.

Sleeping pills - whether herbal or prescription - are being used less than they used to be in countries like Germany. Although products based on herbs like valerian have long been used, the evidence from trials testing their efficacy is far from convincing.

"Prescription sleeping pills can be important in certain situations, but

they can cause a lot of adverse effects and are not a long-term solution. For older people, sleep medication can increase the risk of falling, as well as interfering with other medicines," warns the Institute's Director, Professor Peter Sawicki. "Sleeping pills are not the best way to solve underlying problems like depression or painful conditions that are interfering with a good night's sleep."

The habits that can help people get a better night's sleep

Trials have shown that many people could get to sleep a little sooner if they learned relaxation techniques to help them "switch off" when it is time to go to sleep.

Research suggests that a combination of certain habits can help people sleep better. This includes only going to bed when you are tired and ready to go to sleep. Reading and watching TV in bed could actually make it harder to sleep. If people cannot sleep, it is better for them to get out of bed and do something else rather than focusing on trying to sleep.

Getting up at the same time every morning can help too. Napping during the day might make it harder for you to sleep at night if you are struggling with chronic insomnia.

It is also important to avoid drinking caffeinated drinks and alcohol in the evening. "Most people know that coffee, cola or black tea can interfere with their sleep," says Professor Sawicki. "But many do not realise that alcohol is one of the major causes of a bad night's sleep."

Eight hours a night may not be necessary for everyone

The Institute also looked at research on what is a normal night's sleep.

Studies have shown that as we get older, we actually need less sleep on average. While children and teenagers generally need eight or more hours sleep a night, by the time people are 40, they usually only need seven hours a night.

Source: Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care

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