

Pills no answer to insomnia

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Sleeping tablets are “counter-productive” and offer no real benefit in treating insomnia, Flinders University sleep expert Leon Lack says.

“Most people who take hypnotic drugs still have poor sleep, it remediates the problem in the short-term but it almost always produces a long-term consequence, which is drug dependence,” Professor Lack, pictured wearing Re-timer glasses, says.

“Sleeping tablets provide short-term relief but when people stop taking them they might have a few bad nights and think they can’t sleep without taking the drug,” he says.

“Effectively you buy a bit of sleep on your credit card but then you have to pay it back later, sometimes with interest, so in the long-term you don’t gain anything you just offset the [insomnia](#).”

Professor Lack, based in the School of Psychology, will share his research into insomnia, including causes and cures, at an upcoming public lecture on August 21.

To be held at Flinders University Victoria Square, Sleep Well, Live Better – The Steps to Good Sleep will present information about the different types of insomnia, how it affects people and how it is treated, as well as the role of sleep cycles in understanding the disorder.

Insomnia is defined as persistent difficulties falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or both, resulting in impaired daytime functioning. About a third of all Australians have problems getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking too early, and there are at least 50,000 chronic insomniacs in metropolitan Adelaide.

“What’s particularly frustrating to people with insomnia is that very few things work for them so they feel a loss of control, depression and their quality of life is diminished,” Professor Lack said.

“But it’s important for people to realise that sleep isn’t just one long, homogenous period of unconsciousness – we go through different stages of sleep, from a deep sleep which lasts 80 to 90 minutes into a lighter, dreaming sleep, and over the course of a night we experience this pattern three or four times.

“During the light sleep stage you’re likely to awaken – which is perfectly normal and increases with age – but the media’s constant reports about the importance of a solid eight hours sleep create anxiety and anxiety in the middle of the night is not conducive to sleep, so then it becomes

ingrained.”

Professor Lack said the best way to prevent insomnia was to practice good sleep habits, such as using the bedroom only for sleep and going to bed when tired, getting up if you cannot fall asleep and for those who wake during the night, reducing time in bed for a couple of weeks will help.

“If you don’t fall asleep within 15 minutes of going to bed then get up, don’t lie there awake because that associates the bedroom with frustration and anxiety,” Professor Lack said.

Difficulty falling asleep can also be caused by a delayed body clock which can be treated with morning bright light, he said.

Professor Lack and his colleagues have pioneered bright light therapy for this type of insomnia and have developed, in conjunction with Flinders Partners, portable bright light therapy devices know as [Re-timers](#).

Provided by Flinders University

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