

# Chronic Insomnia

Dr Olga Runcie, Consultant Psychiatrist / Sleep Specialist

## What is Insomnia and how can this affect you

Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder. Chronic insomnia is reported to affect up to 10% of the general populations.

Insomnia occurs when someone has persistent difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep. Insomnia can result in many forms of daytime impairment: fatigue, concentration or memory impairment, reduced motivation and energy. People with insomnia tend to be more irritable, anxious and having low mood.

Insomnia causes much distress to sufferers and is associated with low quality of life, a high level of absenteeism from work and physical and mental illness. In the treatment of long-term insomnia, the most important factor to be addressed is anxiety and fear about the experience and maladaptive behavioural routines leading to a vicious insomnia cycle.

## Medication Treatments for Insomnia

There are many different types of sleep aids for Insomnia, including over-the-counter (non-prescription) and prescription medications. Main prescription medications for Insomnia in the UK include benzodiazepine hypnotics (Diazepam, Temazepam) and non-benzodiazepine hypnotics (Zolpidem, Zopiclone). Doctors also frequently prescribe sedative antidepressants and sometime even small doses of sedative antipsychotic medication to improve sleep. Sleeping pills can have serious side effects and you can become dependent on them.

Some over-counter medications, herbal supplements and melatonin are advertised for treatment of insomnia. Although melatonin can be very helpful medication in addressing some sleep difficulties, it only works if taken correctly at individually specified time, at the correct doses and for correct indications. Deciding which medication may be right for you depends on the type and duration of insomnia symptoms and many other different health factors. This is why it's important to consult with a doctor before taking a sleep aid and to make sure that you have on-going medical monitoring reviewing medication effectiveness. You need to remember that medication does not address the causes of Insomnia and for this reason, it is frequently ineffective in a long-term.

Medication might be effective for acute insomnia symptoms, but usually does not work in chronic insomnia.

## Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is an effective treatment for insomnia leading to sustained improvement in sleep. It works by targeting the factors maintaining chronic insomnia and resulting in sustained changes in sleep behaviours and sleep-attitudes. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is recommended by The American College of Physicians as a first line treatment for chronic Insomnia.

Treatment protocol for Insomnia is much individualised, the number of sessions required for therapy varies between 4 and 8. Response to treatment largely depends on patient's engagements and adherence to treatment recommendations.