

## Finding alternative ways of dealing with insomnia

Health matters

### A column

By VALERIE DeLAUNE

Insomnia affects most of us at one time or another. For some it may mean an inability to fall asleep easily; for others it may mean frequent waking, restless sleep, waking early in the morning, or dream-disturbed sleep. As our society gets busier and busier, the cause may be an inability to stop thinking or worrying, or physical causes such as too much heat somewhere in the body or inappropriate foods.

Sometimes insomnia is temporary and secondary to another problem. Once the underlying cause is solved, such as pain, coughing, or a specific stressful situation, the patient will sleep soundly.

From a Chinese Medicine perspective, the practitioner will question the patient in-depth about sleep patterns. They will want to know what times you wake throughout the night, and whether you have sweats, disturbing dreams, or if you've ever suffered from major blood loss, among other symptoms.

Treatment may focus on clearing heat from the body or a particular acupuncture meridian. It may involve "tonifying" an organ system such as the digestive system so it absorbs nutrients to properly build healthy blood. If stress is part of the problem the treatment will focus on calming the mind, or points that dispel worry or anger.

Snoring may not disturb your own sleep, but might be a problem for others in the vicinity. Snoring is usually due to either too much phlegm, or qi (energy) flowing the "wrong" direction in some of the acupuncture meridians. Treatment would focus on clearing phlegm and selecting points that would cause qi to flow in the correct direction.

Some people stop breathing for several seconds. Known as sleep apnea, the patient's sleep is disturbed briefly when the brain triggers a new breath. Most people won't remember the disturbances when they wake, but they don't get enough oxygen, and their sleep is disrupted enough that they are fatigued during the day. Often weight plays a role in sleep apnea, and treatment would likely focus on clearing phlegm and treating the cause of the excess weight.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, in addition to acupuncture, try drinking at least two to three quarts of water per day, and more if you drink dehydrating substances such as coffee or black tea. Stay off your computer in the evening, because it stimulates the brain, and avoid working long hours with inadequate rest. Avoid greasy and spicy foods, particularly at night. If you get to a point in the evening where your energy flags, don't push through it. Pushing yourself into using "false energy" is one of the major causes of insomnia and leads to

### Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Try to eat and sleep at the same times every day. Above all, the body likes routine. This is particularly important if you are under severe stress, but is usually the first thing to go. If you wake to an alarm clock, you are probably not getting enough sleep. Try going to bed early enough that you wake before your alarm goes off.

Moderate exercise is a great stress-reducer and helps your body function properly. Getting full-spectrum light into your retinas during the day helps produce melatonin for sleep.

According to Traditional Chinese Medical wisdom, the best sleep position is lying on the right side with the legs slightly bent. The right arm is bent and resting in front of the pillow, and the left arm rests on the left thigh. Your practitioner will have additional suggestions based on your particular symptoms.

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