

❖ **SLEEPING DIFFICULTIES/INSOMNIA**

**What commonly causes sleep disturbance?**

Some people can have trouble either falling asleep or staying asleep and this can occur very rarely or happen more frequently in others. It can occur for a few reasons such as;

- × stress/worrying so you can't switch off or 'wind-down' at night
- × travelling; time difference can play havoc with your system
- × consuming alcohol/tea/coffee or cigarettes before bed can all keep you awake
- × Too much fluid after 3pm can wake you up to go to the bathroom and then can't get back to sleep.
- × certain medications; weight loss medications or antidepressants
- × Medical conditions; restless legs syndrome, sleep apnoea or thyroid problems.
- × Shift work; the natural rhythm constantly gets disrupted

**What can I try to do to improve my symptoms?**

The main strategies that you can try and improve include the following;

- ✓ Avoid caffeine in tea, coffee, soft drinks and chocolate as well as cigarette smoking, alcohol and excess fluid intake after 3 pm so that they do not keep you awake.
- ✓ Avoid watching TV or looking at the computer at least 1-2 hours before bedtime as the bright lights tend to 'stimulate' the mind and make it harder to switch off and be calm
- ✓ Try not to have naps throughout the day as this can play havoc with your normal sleep patterns
- ✓ Try and go to sleep and wake up at the same times each day, even on weekends to train your body
- ✓ Learn some relaxation techniques; journal writing, meditate do affirmations before bed to calm the mind of any unnecessary thoughts
- ✓ Avoid vigorous exercise too close to bedtime as it will 'stimulate' you
- ✓ Remove the clock in your room; not only will the noise or lights disturb you, it is so easy to focus on the time when you know you aren't falling asleep and keep counting how many more hours you have left before you need to wake up again; recipe for disaster!
- ✓ Consider taking a warm relaxing bath before bed; this can really calm the nerves and be a good soothing wind-down method
- ✓ Make sure you have not eaten too much as indigestion can cause a restless sleep. On the other hand, don't go to sleep hungry as this will be a problem too! Consider having a small snack of some wholegrain toast or crackers that will keep you full throughout the night without overfilling you!
- ✓ Use an eye-mask or ear-plugs if you are sensitive to light and noise. Light sleepers can often lose precious sleep from being disturbed by silly noises! If your partner snores, then look into what that may be from!
- ✓ Make sure your bed is comfortable and if it hasn't been replaced in a while, you may need an upgrade!

**What natural products exist over-the-counter to treat my symptoms?**

Natural products tend to be less habit forming than some other over-the-counter medications available in pharmacy so they are a good option if you recurrently have these symptoms.

There is no 'one' better product than the next, it may be a matter of trial and error until you find the right product to suit you.

- ✓ **Melatonin**: this helps to regulate the normal circadian rhythm so your body knows when it is day or night (especially useful for jet lag to acclimatise to the timings much faster)
- ✓ **Magnesium**: is a muscle relaxant and can reduce cramping, so good for night cramps as well as calming nerves
- ✓ **Skull Cap**: plant derived that causes drowsiness
- ✓ **Valerian**: used for insomnia and can promote sleep
- ✓ **B-vitamins**: good for stress and anxiety and to improve the mood
- ✓ **Schizandra**: plant that reduces insomnia
- ✓ **Zizyphus**: can calm the mind and help to switch off overactive thoughts
- ✓ **Hops**: helps calm the body and helps anxiety and insomnia
- ✓ **Lemon balm**: relaxes the nervous system and causes drowsiness
- ✓

<b><u>BRAND</u></b>	<b><u>INGREDIENTS</u></b>	<b><u>DIRECTIONS</u></b>
Bioglan Melatonin	Melatonin	1-3 night
<u>Swisse Ultiboost Sleep</u>	Magnesium 6.4mg, Hops, Valerian 1.3G and liquorice	1-2 tablet 30 minutes to 1 hour before bed
<u>Swisse Ultiboost relax and sleep</u>	Hops 500mg, Passionflower 1.5G, Lemon Balm 750mg, Magnesium	2 tablets 1 hour before bed
<u>Blackmore's Sleep sound relief</u>	Valerian: 1.2G, lemon balm: 825mg, magnesium: 55mg	2 tablets 30 minutes before bed
<u>Blackmore's Tranquil night</u>	Lavender: 600mg, HOPS: 250mg, oats: 250mg	2 tablets 30 minutes before sleep
<u>Ethical nutrients sleep enhance</u>	Chinese ginseng. Reduces the time to fall asleep and increases the duration of it	2 tablets 30 minutes before sleep
<u>Cenovis Easy sleep valerian 2000mg</u>	2000mg valerian	2 tablets 30 minutes before sleep
<u>Nature's own Complete Sleep</u>	Lactium and zizyphus	2 tablets 30 minutes before sleep
<u>Nature's Own Complete sleep hot drink</u>	Lemon balm, chamomile, lactium	2-3 teaspoons into 200mL warm milk 30 to 60 seconds before bed
<u>Nature's own Valerian forte</u>	2000mg valerian	1 tablet 30 minutes before bed

### **What are the stronger medications I can get from the pharmacist?**

Essentially the products you get which are marketed for sleep are anti-histamines that cause drowsiness. They ideally should only be used for 2 to 3 nights in a row or only when you need them to help 'break the pattern' and then stopped after that as unfortunately they are habit forming. They also can leave you with a 'heavy head' or drowsiness the next morning which can be annoying!

The other thing to note is that although 'over-the-counter', they do interact with various medications (and should never be taken with alcohol) and have side-effects so should only be used short-term and at the lowest dose. Side effects which can occur immediately or if used long-term (and although not to scare you; I am putting them here to indicate that they should only be used short term!!) include;

- × Dizziness
- × Blurred vision
- × Loss of co-ordination (increased risk of falls especially in the elderly)
- × Anxiety
- × Tremor
- × Nausea/vomiting/constipation or diarrhoea
- × Dry mouth
- × Urinary retention (problem with people that have incontinence or prostate problems)
- × Palpitations
- × Hallucinations and many more!

### **What products exist?**

All these products are available from your pharmacist. As a general rule, the tablets are better than capsules as they can be broken into half or a quarter if only a small dose is needed. They should be taken 30 minutes before bed so they can start working by the time you want to sleep.

If you are finding that you need them more often, then chat to your doctor about alternatives.

<b><u>PRODUCT</u></b>	<b><u>INGREDIENT</u></b>	<b><u>DIRECTIONS</u></b>
Restavit tablets	Doxylamine 25mg	Take half-two tablets 30 minutes before bed
Dozile tablets or capsules	Doxylamine 25mg	Take half-two tablets 30 minutes before bed
Unisom Sleep gels	Diphenhydramine 50mg	Take 1 capsule 30 minutes before bed
Phenergan	Promethazine 10 or 25mg	Take 1-3 tablets 30 minutes before bed