



HOW TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP*

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Statistics claim that nearly 2/3 of adult Americans don't sleep well. Are you one of them? The commonest cause of poor sleep is anxiety and stress that leaks from the day into the night. Another common cause is pain and discomfort—pain in joints, pain in muscles, headaches, digestive pain, difficulty breathing, post-nasal drip, snoring, frequent need to urinate...all these and more can interfere with sleep. Do you know someone who has difficulty sleeping? If so, read on, and let that someone know that **acupuncture can help. I've helped a lot of my patients who complained of insomnia!**

Insomnia = A Poor Night's Sleep

Sleep, as (I think) everyone knows, repairs fatigue and all the excesses of daily life. It gives the digestive system a chance to do nothing for a few hours; it gives the heart a chance to beat more slowly and rest. The brain rests by turning off its logical guardian and tuning in to its creative side. Rain or shine, party or not, adults need about 8 hours of sleep each night (teens need 10 or more). These hours need to be *planned* in to everyone's life. Sleep can't be 'made up' on the weekend, and the less one follows a sleep schedule, the more likely one is to develop insomnia. Anxiety, pain and frustration make the problem worse. Once this pattern goes on for a while, the body goes into a kind of overdrive ('sympathetic dominance') that must be remedied to sleep well again. Untreated stress reactions—overdrive—eventually lead to burnout (a state of exhaustion), and encourage the development of chronic disease.

So--bottom line--to be well, one must sleep.

A whole lot easier said than done! Some of us lay our heads on the pillow and it's away to dreamland. But for those so tired that they feel too frazzled to sleep, and for those with pain, the tasks of falling asleep or staying asleep can be frustrating. Discouragement sets in, and worry adds to the burden. What to do? Some take sleeping or pain pills and these help for a while...but they also create side-effects and may be addictive. Sometimes when people try to stop the drugs, they experience rebound insomnia, even worse than the original problem.

My suggestion? : use acupuncture (and possibly herbs and enzymes) to reduce your stress and pain and improve your ability to sleep. **Add some lifestyle modifications** and you should be on your way to better health and more energy.

Causes of Insomnia

Oriental medicine recognizes two different main 'causes' for insomnia, the Yang excess type where you can't let go of the day and relax into sleep, and the Yin Deficiency type in which you wake in the wee hours, often with the next day's problems on your mind. Naturally these are treated differently, but in both cases, acupuncture can go a long way toward providing help. Once your acupuncturist has determined which Organs are under the most stress, and whether the problem is more of a Yin or Yang issue, she or

he can choose acupoints that will make a big difference. Some people even fall asleep on my table, and I hate to wake them when the treatment hour is over!

Special herbal combinations can also help. These combinations are designed to minimize side-effects such as morning grogginess, weight gain, or addiction. For those whose sleep is mainly interrupted because of stress reactions, such herbs can be used alone. Others will want to combine sleep-enhancement herbs with pain-control herbals to achieve both pain control and better sleep. Herbs do not interfere with most pharmaceuticals. Nevertheless, it's not wise to take herbs for sleeping if you are already taking pharmaceutical sleeping pills.

In my practice I also offer enzyme-herb combinations, and these can also provide pain control and support better sleep. Enzymes have the advantage of being very non-toxic. I recommend them when I think that a big part of the person's problem is that they have forgotten how to relax. In our highly intense competitive urban setting, many people try to live full time in energetic overdrive, and they do forget how to relax. Then I provide enzyme-herb combinations that calm the sympathetic dominance reaction and put the body back into balance. **Acupuncture treatments do much the same thing, so the combination of acupuncture in the office and enzymes at home has a good chance of improving health at a deep level.**

How To Help Yourself

Enhance your own sleep experience by making some simple lifestyle changes.

There are two important points here: 1. Prepare yourself to sleep every evening. 2. Make your bedroom a good place to sleep.

Prepare to sleep. It's just about impossible to go from full-alert daytime Yang mentality into Yin sleep without spending some time calming down during the evening. How do you calm? Choose activities that are calming. After dinner, relax with a book, a hobby, look at photos or colored pictures, draw or color, listen to soft music, or be quietly active by knitting, playing games or reading to children. All these create a transition zone from day to sleep, and activate the creative brain while allowing the logical brain to rest. I emphasize this calming phase because so many of my patients insist that they *have* to work in the evening, or *cannot* miss the 11 PM news!—yet evening is a time to stop work, stop competition, stop noise and computers and TV news and violent programming, and withdraw into rest. In Chinese medical terms, in the evening Yang energy is waning, Yin is rising—but if you insist of bringing the day into the night, you draw down both forms of energy, create imbalance in your system, and wind up sleepless and cranky!

Make Your Bedroom a Sanctuary. Keep it orderly. Do not keep a TV in the bedroom—unless you are sick abed, it's best to watch in another room and then come to your bedroom just to sleep. Keep the bedroom quiet and cool. Use a mattress and pillow that provide comfortable support—this is a big topic I can't go into here, but be serious about the quality of your bedding. Humidify if your nose or eyes get dry. Most of all, make the room *dark*—it is only in the dark that the sleep hormone melatonin is released and melatonin has a major role in guiding all your other hormones! To get a dark bedroom, cover clock and radio faces, turn off nightlights, tape over (*only!*) the tiny red dots on the smoke detector, use light-proof blinds or curtains, and in general, create a cave. These simple actions can make a huge difference in the quality of your sleep.