Insomnia? A disturbing sleep disturbance! [1]

Alice,

I have recurring insomnia which lasts for about eight to twelve days. It seems to begin at about the same time each month. What are the common causes of sleep disturbance? Any suggestions?

? Sleepless

Answer

Dear Sleepless,

Insomnia is probably the most common sleep-related complaint along with daytime drowsiness. As with fever, it is not a disease, but a symptom. Insomnia affects nearly everyone at some point in their lives. Anxiety about a presentation or exam, psychological stress, environmental factors (such as noise, temperature changes, etc.), and pain can cause any person to have changes in her/his sleeping patterns. Look for clues in your own life that may suggest why the insomnia begins and ends at the same time each month. It is only you who knows your lifestyle best and is able to judge what's causing your sleeplessness.

There could be a number of causes of insomnia that are affecting you. For some people stress or anxiety can disrupt sleep patterns, others feel compelled to stay up late to finish work or socialize, and others sleep poorly when they aren't getting enough exercise. In certain environments, say a prestigious college or university, friends or acquaintances sometimes end up competing to see who can "get by" on the least amount of sleep. Could any of these factors be playing a role for you? If the insomnia is interfering with your work or studies, or your general quality of life, you may want to visit a sleep specialist.

If you are a woman it's possible that your menstrual cycle is playing a role in your monthly bouts of insomnia. Consider what else is going on in your life on a monthly basis: Do you have an event that could be causing you anxiety? Do you have a medical treatment or routine that may be playing a role? Do you have a regular financial commitment that causes you to worry? When you visit a health care provider, they may ask you to keep a journal of your daily events and any sleep problems. Journaling this way can help you identify patterns that you may otherwise miss.

While your considering your next move, here are some general sleep tips:
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine before bedtime. If you’re especially sensitive, avoid caffeine entirely.
- Use your bed only for sleeping and sex, not studying.
- Establish your bed as a cool and comfortable space. Avoid lots of light and noise.
- Exercising regularly is good for getting quality sleep, however, try not to exercise too close to bedtime or you might have difficulty winding down.
- Establish a relaxing routine for getting ready for bed (a bath, shower, listening to calm music).
- Try to avoid using your computer or watching TV right before bed.
- Be consistent; try to go to bed and wake up at the same time in the morning during the weekdays and on the weekend.
- Take short power naps during the day if you feel tired. However, try not to sleep too much during the day or you might have difficulty falling asleep at night.
- Stay on top of schoolwork so you don’t have to stay up late at night to finish. Avoiding procrastination and practicing time management will help you to feel less stressed, better prepared, and will allow you to get amount of sleep you need.
- Try not to pull all nighters. Sleep will help you do your best!

Good luck parsing out your insomnia triggers and the strategies that will help you rest,

Alice!
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