

THE **Beginner's Guide** to **homeopathy**

continuing our major partwork



SLEEP PROBLEMS

BY DAVID CURTIN MB, BS, MFHOM, MCH, PCHOM

homoeopathic physician, London and Oxford

Insomnia or sleeplessness is a common problem in the modern world: so many people live such busy lives, rushing from one place to the next, and from one task to the next. And we are surrounded by noise – noise from traffic, washing machines, air conditioning, televisions, the children's stereo. In cities, it is quite common for such noise to continue all night.

Fortunately, human beings are designed to be adaptive, and most of us learn to filter out unwanted noise. However, when we are under stress these natural adaptive mechanisms don't function so well.

Some common causes of insomnia in adults include:

- Depression
- Anxiety or fear
- Excitement
- Pain
- Shift work or overwork
- Noise
- New baby
- Old age
- Eating late
- Alcohol, coffee, tea or other stimulants
- Uncomfortable bed or bed too small
- Cold
- Insufficient exercise.

In children causes include:

- Hunger
- Pain – teething, ear ache, colic
- Fear or anxiety, nightmares
- Excitement
- Noise.

There is no one easy answer to insomnia: finding and treating the cause is the most effective solution. In some cases there will be several causes.

Sleeping tablets will often help, but they are not always effective, they can be addictive and they may have side-effects. Also, they do nothing to solve the underlying problem.

If the underlying problem is addressed then sometimes this alone will restore normal healthy sleep patterns. In some cases a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Any serious causes of insomnia should, of course, be treated under the supervision of an appropriate health professional.

Self help

Simple tips:

- Wind down gradually in the evenings. Do not watch stimulating television programmes late in the evening or read stimulating books
- Do not have a television in your bedroom and do not read in bed unless you are quite sure that reading actually helps you to get to sleep
- Avoid eating late in the evening
- Avoid stimulating drinks in the evening – tea and coffee
- Avoid alcohol late in the evening unless you know that it helps you to sleep
- Alcohol often causes disturbed sleep, even though it may help you to get to sleep
- Take 10-15 minutes to wind down when you get in from work if at all possible
- Ideally find a quiet place, lie on your back and then relax each muscle in your body in turn, beginning with your feet, and working up to your head. Then lie quietly and let your mind drift. Do this everyday
- Try to find a bedtime routine that suits you.
- Put young children to bed as soon as practicable. Routines are helpful for most children and most adults
- Avoid sleeping in late in the mornings if you are over-tired. This can disrupt sleep patterns and result in making you more tired. Go to bed earlier instead
- Try self-hypnosis. Lie down in a quiet room and close your eyes. Imagine yourself in a luxuriously comfortable place. Let your imagination flood itself with all the sensations that you would like to experience: touch, sound, colours, smells, even tastes. Choose those that are calming and relaxing. Practise this and you will find that when you are in bed ready to go to sleep you will remember those sensations
- Self-hypnosis sleep tapes can be helpful
- Get a good bed. Good beds are expensive but they really make a difference. Many people believe that pocket-sprung mattresses are the best.

Your bed should be neither too soft or too hard. A double bed should be at least 150 cm wide (5ft) and preferably 165 cm for two people. Most double beds are smaller than this. Remember, you spend a third of your life in bed.

Homoeopathy

As always with homoeopathy, the remedy must be chosen according to the symptoms of the individual. Some of the remedies used may already be familiar to you. Here are some of the more commonly used remedies. I have put them in the order in which I most often prescribe them, starting with the most common.

Nux vomica

The patient goes to sleep late because of a feeling of thoughts crowding in on him. He or she wakes at 3 am and lies awake until daybreak, when he falls into a dull sleep full of dreams, from which it is hard to rouse. He wakes late, feeling tired.

He or she feels drowsy after meals and in the early evening. His dreams are full of bustle and hurry. He feels better after a short sleep, unless aroused.

He has a great flow of ideas in bed in the evening, which often drive away sleep until morning.

Experiences sleeplessness and excitement after overwork or over-stimulation.

Dreams of quarrels.

Coffea

The patient experiences complete sleeplessness and is constantly moving and excited. Sleeps until 3 am, after which he or she is only able to doze. Wakes with a start and feels excited. His sleep is disturbed by dreams.

Experiences sleeplessness because of mental activity; has a flow of ideas, accompanied by nervous excitability.

This remedy is good for hyperactive or hypersensitive children.

Belladonna

The patient has fever, dryness of the mouth, cold extremities and hunger.

There is pulsation of the blood-vessels, and the patient may hear this so loudly when trying to sleep as to be kept awake by it.

He or she experiences comatose sleep at night, with frequent waking and convulsive movements.

The patient's sleep may be accompanied by moaning and tossing about.

There may be nocturnal sleeplessness, sometimes with the desire to sleep and useless efforts to go to sleep, mostly because of feelings of great anguish or agitation.

Dreams may be described as anxious, terrible, frightful and vivid. They may be about fires, robbers and assassins, or may be meditative dreams. On closing the eyes in order to go to sleep, the patient sees frightful visions and experiences jerking in the limbs.

This remedy is often used during childhood fevers.

Colocynthis

The patient experiences sleeplessness following a fit of indigestion or colic. This remedy can be very useful in children.

The patient is very wakeful and sleepless. When asleep the patient lies on his or her back, with one hand under the occiput.

Chamomilla

Patient has nocturnal sleeplessness, with attacks of anguish, visions and illusions involving sight and hearing. On sleeping, the patient starts with fright, cries, tosses about, is tearful, talks, raves, groans, snores and constantly separates the thighs.

The patient has fantastic, lively, quarrelsome and vexatious dreams, with a morose and sullen aspect.

This remedy is commonly indicated in teething children. They have difficulty falling asleep, and demand things only to refuse them. They want to be picked up and carried, but this only helps for a short time.

Aconite

The patient has nightmares and anxious dreams. He or she experiences sleeplessness, and is restless and tosses about (use 30th potency). The patient starts up in sleep, has long dreams, with feelings of anxiety centred on the chest. Insomnia of the aged.

The patient experiences drowsiness, with anxious thoughts and rapid respiration. This is especially associated with fear of dying.

The patient is sleepless because of anxiety, constantly agitated and tosses about

Arsenicum

The patient is disturbed, anxious, restless, agitated and tosses and turns. He must have his head raised by pillows. The patient has suffocating fits during sleep. He or she sleeps with the hands over the head. His dreams are full of care and fear.

He is usually worse at or after midnight.

Children are very demanding and will cry for their parents to come and help.

The patient is thirsty for sips of water.

Phosphorus

Used for sleeplessness in old people. The patient goes to sleep late and awakens feeling weak. Has short naps with frequent waking.

Has vivid dreams of fire or of haemorrhage. Has lascivious dreams. Has anxious, distressing dreams that are frightful and horrible; or vivid and uneasy dreams; for example, of animals that bite, of robbers, of

unfinished business of the day, bloodshed, death, quarrels, creeping things etc.

The patient walks in his or her sleep.

He or she is afraid of the dark and wants company.

Pulsatilla

The patient feels wide awake in the evening and his or her first sleep is restless. He wakes feeling languid and unrefreshed. He or she feels irresistible sleepiness in afternoon. He sleeps with the hands over the head. He dislikes being covered. May be chilly but likes to have the window open.

This remedy is used in the Pulsatilla child who is timid and lacks confidence and is clingy and weepy if upset.

These children are very impressionable and may have difficult falling asleep if anything disturbing has happened during the day. They may have nightmares about being left by parents and they like to be rocked to sleep.

Stramonium

These patients experience night terrors. They suffer from agitated sleep with vivid dreams. They can be very frightened. A child clings to the parents. They have frightful visions during sleep. They lie on the back with open, staring eyes.

They have a tremendous fear of the dark or fear of violence.

If you are new to homoeopathy, it is best to stick to the sixth potency, and to take one dose every evening before bed. If you are more familiar with using homoeopathy remedies, then you might use the 30th potency, though this is best used for more acute situations. If you need to take the remedy nightly for some time, then the sixth potency is better.

Valeriana

Sleeplessness. Disturbed sleep (patient only able to fall asleep towards morning) with tossing, and anxious and confused dreams.

Can be taken in herbal form in capsules.

Homoeopathic remedies for disturbed sleep are widely sold in health food shops and pharmacies. They are usually combinations of two or three remedies, commonly Nux vomica, Coffea and Valeriana. Combination herbal remedies to assist sleep are also widely available.

Herbal teas are beneficial for many people and a wide variety of these are also easily obtained. The name of the tea will usually indicate its properties, for example Night-time, Sleepytime, and so on.

Do not continue taking any remedy ad infinitum. If you find that you need to keep taking the remedies you should seek professional help.

Repertory

Sleeplessness:

Anger, after:

Acon., Coloc., Nux-v., Bry., Cham., Coff.

Anxiety, from:

Acon., Ars., Cocc., Bry., Caust., Cham, Kali-c. Lach

Excitement, from:

Coff., Hyos., Nux-v., Arg-n., Aur-m.

Fear, fright, from:

Acon., Bry., Cham., Cimic., Cocc., Ign.

Grief, from:

Nat-m., Ign., Kali-br., Sulph.,

Mental exertion, after:

Ars., Nux-v., Calc.

Old people:

Acon, Bar-c., Phos., Ars.

Restlessness, from:

Acon., Apis, Ars., Merc-c., Alum., Bry.

Thoughts, from:

Ars., Calc., Coff., Hep., Nux-v., Op.

Wine, after abuse of:

Nux-v., Coff. Coffee; abuse of, after: Coff., Cham., Nux-v.



ACONITE
Aconitum napellus