



Sleep Problems Can Be Turned Into "Rock-a- Bye-Baby" Habits

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Don't think of elephants?

What are you thinking about? Elephants, right?

Frequently I hear clients who repeatedly state "I can't sleep". They don't realize that our brains tend to do what they hear and by saying this, we actually invite the body to stay awake. There are a number of factors which can initially interfere with good sleep patterns but, once a pattern has begun it is frequently deepened and made rigid by our thought patterns.

According to a recent study based on the 2002 Canadian Community Healthy Survey (CCHS), an estimated 3.3 million Canadians aged 15 and older experience difficulties going to sleep and staying asleep. The study found strong associations between insomnia and a number of factors:

Chronic pain: More than one-fifth of people with arthritis, asthma, back problems or diabetes reported symptoms of insomnia. **Chronic stress:** 23% of individuals who said their days were "extremely" stressful reported insomnia. **Shift work:** Individuals with shift work reported higher rates of insomnia.

Obesity: Respondents whose body mass index (BMI) was greater than 35 and could be categorized as obese, experienced higher rates of insomnia. If you are having sleep problems, there are a number of things you can do to make positive changes:

1. Quit saying "I can't sleep" and start telling yourself (affirming) that you are a good sleeper so that your brain can adjust.
2. Reserve your bedroom for sleep and sex only. Remove televisions, computers, gym equipment and define the room's purpose as being a sanctuary for rest.
3. Ensure that the bed and bedding are comfortable, and the room is completely darkened.
4. Move the bed to a new location in the room and consider painting or redecorating so that you know this is a new beginning in your sleep pattern.
5. Adjust the room temperature so that you are not too hot or too cold. Choose sleepwear that is comfortable and allows the appropriate body temperature.
6. Protect yourself from sleep disturbances. Turn the telephone ringer off, close doors so that pets do not enter the room and if necessary, wear earplugs.
7. Develop a routine that you honour each evening. Most activities in life such as work, sports and community events have start and end times. You need a schedule for your sleep also.
8. Limit eating foods before bedtime and reduce caffeine in your diet.
9. Prepare yourself to sleep. A warm bath and/or a few minutes of reading should replace stimulating activities such as action-packed movies, emotion-charged conversations, or financial planning before bed.
10. When you climb into bed try imagining the feeling you have in the morning where you don't want to get up. Tell yourself that it is time to shut down you're thinking and give yourself permission to relax.

If you have tried all of the above and are still having problems, consult with your physician.

Have a great sleep!