

— T H E —TM

I N S O M N I A

— C L I N I C —

S L E E P W E L L , L I V E B E T T E R

Pillow Talk

Introduction

There is nothing quite like a good night's sleep. In fact, it's entirely essential to our health and wellbeing, but sometimes it can feel easier said than done. And we all know the impact of *losing* a night's sleep. We get grumpy, we struggle to concentrate, our reactions slow down and generally the following day is a bit of a slog. Some occasional sleep loss - triggered by an event or change in circumstances - is quite normal but when sleep loss persists, usually for a period of a month or more, then we would say that person is suffering with insomnia.

Insomnia affects a surprisingly large number of people, in fact around 15 to 30 percent of us can expect to suffer with insomnia at some point in our lives so you

can take some comfort from the fact that you are not alone. More comforting still is the thought that you can begin to help yourself to a better night's sleep by engaging in a course of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia or CBT-i for short.

How Does It Work?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for insomnia (CBT-i) is a step by step programme designed to help you to take personal control over your insomnia. By identifying bad habits, understanding why these habits can lead to a poor night's sleep, and through learning new skills that will help you overcome your bad habits, you can start to make a positive difference to your sleep.

How does insomnia develop?

Although we're all different, research has shown us that there is a distinct pattern to how sleep loss becomes chronic and insomnia develops. That pattern generally follows three stages:

Firstly, a person may be more prone to sleep difficulty than others. They may be a naturally anxious person or struggle to 'switch off' at night. These factors would **predispose** somebody to insomnia.

There is also usually something that **triggers** an episode of insomnia. This could be a period of emotional stress like losing a loved one or going through a divorce. It could be a sudden change in the environment - for instance a building site appearing nearby - or it could be as simple as a cough and cold which disrupts your sleep pattern. These are all things that would lead most of us to lose some sleep but when things don't return to normal, it can lead to insomnia.

As a result of the poor sleep, **habits and behaviours** develop which are intended to combat the effects of sleep loss but which end up making the problem worse. We sleep during the day, we drink tea or coffee to try and stay alert and although these things can help us in the short term they make it more difficult to sleep at night.

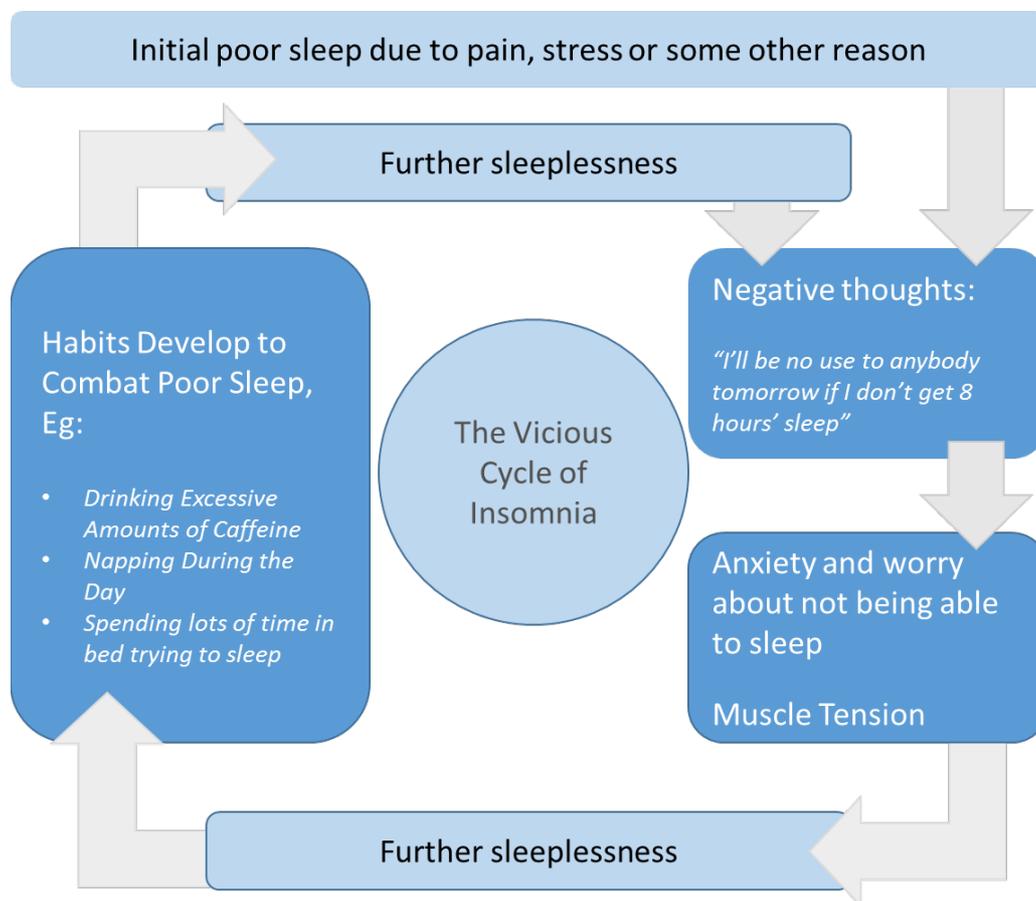
We then start to spend more time in bed in order to get more sleep and may even try weird and wonderful techniques like lavender on the pillow, hot milk before bed and eating bananas, all of which will have a negative effect on our ability to fall asleep. These actions, intended to overcome the initial sleeplessness, in actual fact have the opposite effect, training our bodies *not* to fall asleep, developing what we refer to as *Conditioned Insomnia*.



The longer this goes on, the worse it becomes.

The vicious cycle of insomnia

Following the pattern of how insomnia develops and worsens, we can see how easy it is to fall into a cycle of sleeplessness. And this is why insomnia is often referred to as a 'Vicious Cycle'. It is a continuous loop of negative events and it works as follows:



Activity

Think about the bad habits you may have slipped into to try and overcome your sleeplessness and then fill out the habits section of **Worksheet 1**

This CBT-i programme is aimed at breaking this cycle by overcoming the bad habits. You will learn techniques and cognitive behavioural practices that help to regain control of your sleep. Some first steps you can make are to check you have good 'Sleep Health'.

Sleep health

Just as a good oral hygiene or personal hygiene routine is important if we want to be clean and healthy, a good sleep health routine is important to getting a good night's sleep. With good sleep health we can develop some good habits, overcome some bad ones and begin to break the vicious cycle of insomnia. Although poor sleep hygiene itself is rarely a cause of insomnia, a good sleep hygiene routine can be used as a bed for us to build on.

Good habits

Put the day to rest.

Most people report poor sleep as being due to a 'racing mind'. Combat this by learning how to put the day to rest before you get into bed. Get a pen and paper and write down everything you have on your mind, however trivial and include your worries around sleep. No need to solve them all but just writing them down can be a therapeutic way to feel less anxious in bed.

Keep your bedroom for sleeping.

Your bedroom should have two uses, sleeping and sex. It's not for watching TV or doing work or eating or anything else. You need to strengthen your association between bedroom and sleeping so remove anything from the bedroom – desks, TVs, radios – that you don't need for sleeping and set aside other areas of the house for those activities.

Minimise noise and light in the bedroom.

Both light and noise will limit your sleep and while you may not be able to resolve everything there are positive steps you can take to limit the effect they have on your sleep. Keep your windows closed and put up some blackout curtains if you can

to eliminate outside noise and light. If your partner snores, then it's a good idea to ask them (nicely) to sleep in a different room. If you need an alarm clock try not to use one that ticks, but at the same time you don't want a digital clock that gives off too much bright light either.

Make good use of light during the day.

Just as we need darkness to sleep, we need the light to wake up. Our bodies are 'programmed' to use light and dark to tell us when it's time to sleep and when it's time to be awake so during the day try and get as much light as you can. This will help to regulate your natural body clock.

Keep to regular schedules.

This is often overlooked but is so important. Your body clock is just that, a clock. If you don't keep a steady rhythm then it gets confused and the result is weaker, lesser quality sleep so keep to the same wake time everyday, regardless of how tired you may be.

Caffeine before bedtime.

Caffeine is a stimulant and it will keep you awake. If you're struggling with sleep loss, then this might feel like a positive during the day but at night it becomes a problem. The stimulating effects of caffeine last for around 3-4 hours so you should stop drinking caffeine at least **four hours before bedtime**. And that's not just tea and coffee either. Many soft drinks and even cocoa drinks contain caffeine so it's best to avoid any of these before bedtime.

A little nightcap.

This might seem like a good idea, as the sedative effect of alcohol may help you drift off to sleep. Unfortunately, as the effect wears off the body starts to experience withdrawal which makes us restless and can lead to night-time waking. If you have a sleep problem, then it's best to avoid alcohol for **4 - 6 hours before bedtime**.

Smoking before bed.

One last cigarette before bedtime might also seem like a good idea, particularly as nicotine withdrawal can also keep you awake. However, nicotine is a stimulant

with effects similar to those of caffeine and so should be avoided for at least **4 hours before bedtime**.

Exercising before bedtime.

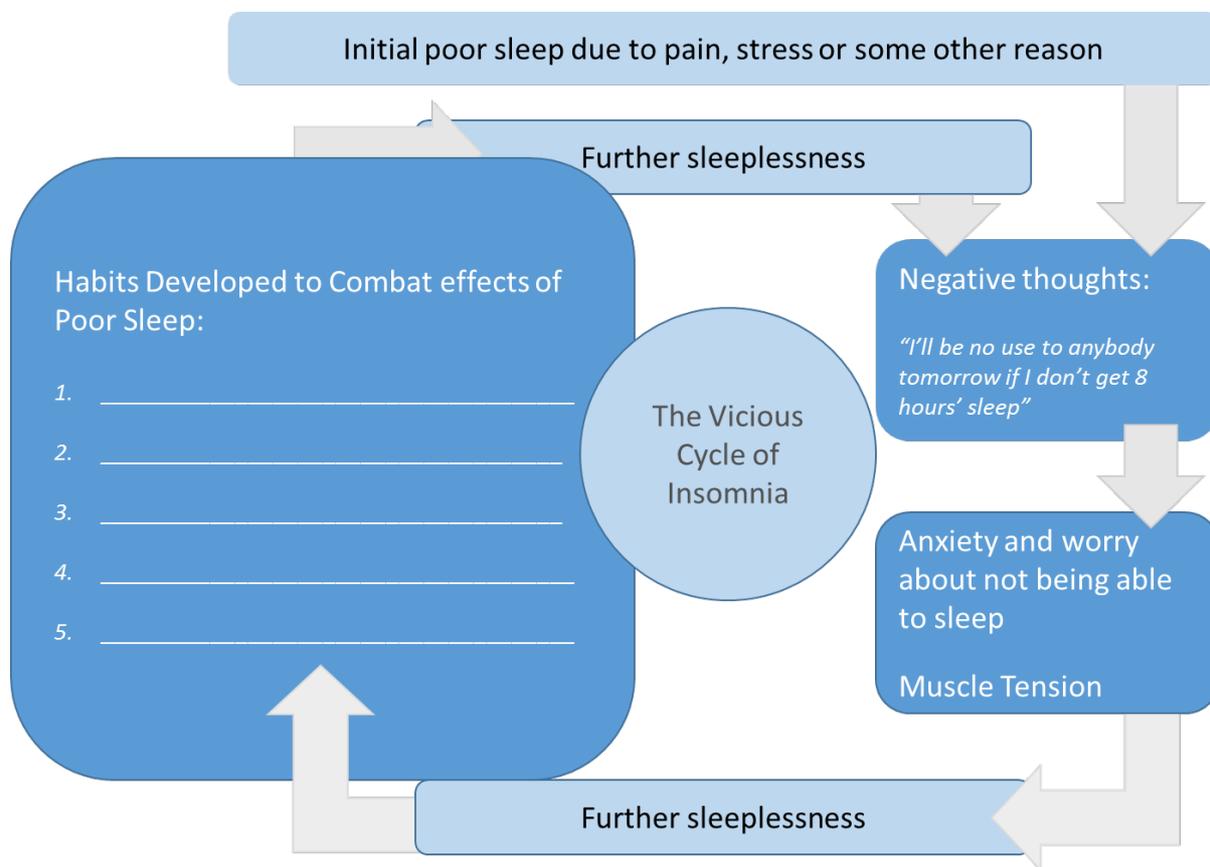
This also has a stimulant effect and although it's useful for overcoming some of the issues - like stress or depression - that may be stopping you from sleeping at night, strenuous exercise is best avoided within **2 hours of bedtime**.

Staying in bed when you are wide awake

As discussed in the section above regarding how we develop insomnia, one of the worst, and most common mistakes a poor sleeper makes is staying in bed when they can't sleep. This means that your mind starts to relate your bed to being awake rather than being asleep and suddenly when you get into bed, ping, you are wide awake. So, if you can't sleep, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy again then return to bed.

Worksheet 1: Vicious Cycle of Insomnia

Please complete the below diagram with any habits you have picked up to try and combat the effects of sleeplessness. Some examples might include *Sleeping during the day, drinking excessive amounts of caffeine or spending a long time in bed trying to get to sleep.*



This is just a taster of the CBT programme we use with people everyday to cure their poor sleep. With over 85% of people reporting improved sleep in just four weeks it really does work.

Please visit us at www.theinsomniaclinic.co.uk for more details on how we can help you.