- Insomnia

NATURAL FIXES

Get Better Shut-Eye

Try these holistic remedies for relief from insomnia.

BY MADELEINE HAASE

Just one terrible night's sleep can leave you feeling awful the next day. For those who struggle with insomnia, the frustration, fatigue, and other symptoms multiply quickly. Fortunately, there are ways to find relief.

Simply put, insomnia is a sleep disorder in which you have difficulty falling asleep and/or staying asleep, says sleep specialist Raj Dasgupta, M.D., who serves on the *Prevention* medical board. Stress, anxiety, and having an irregular sleep schedule are big insomnia triggers, and it can also be linked to health issues like pain, depression, and breathing problems. Some medications, such as ones for asthma and blood pressure, can affect sleep too.

Since so much of insomnia has to do with stress, it's well worth it to give certain natural fixes a go before seeing a doctor. Here, some home remedies Dr. Dasgupta says may help on their own.

MEDITATION

This ancient stress-reducing practice has many benefits, but doing it about five to 10 minutes before bed may help you quiet your thoughts and relax your body, making it easier to fall asleep, says Dr. Dasgupta. There are videos online as well as both paid and free apps offering guided meditations and breathing exercises specifically meant to help you fall asleep. You may feel distracted during meditation at first, but keep at it and it will become easier over time.

MAGNESIUM

This mineral helps muscles relax and supports the function of calming neurotransmitters in the brain, says Dr. Dasgupta. You can take it as a supplement (magnesium glycinate is the formulation many doctors recommend) or eat magnesium-rich foods like nuts and leafy greens. Just don't

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overdo it—too much of the mineral can lead to digestive issues. Always talk to your doctor before starting a new supplement, and ask for recommendations of reputable third-party-tested brands.

LAVENDER

Often used in aromatherapy to help calm the mind and ease stress, lavender may help you drift off as well, says Dr. Dasgupta. Try using lavender oil in a diffuser or dabbing some on your wrists. If you are sensitive to the smell or have skin that's easily irritated, drinking a cup of lavender tea as you're winding down in the evening may help.

TRUNK ARCHIVE.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

If you've had sleep troubles for a few weeks and they're affecting your energy, mood, or ability to focus, call your doctor, says Dr. Dasgupta. Sleep specialists often recommend cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) as a first option—CBT helps you identify thoughts and behaviors that may be causing your sleep problems and learn to replace them with more useful ones. If that doesn't help, medications are usually the next step, he says, but these are ideally taken only in the short term so as to avoid creating physical or psychological dependence.