

Oriental Medicine Lays Insomnia to Rest

By: Lily Rogers, PCOM Staff

Insomnia is more than tossing and turning. It's more serious than an inability to fall asleep early and has more debilitating effects than are commonly recognized. An estimated 32 million people suffer from insomnia in the U.S. Oriental medicine, with its focus on healing whole syndromes rather than individual symptoms, is widely used as an insomnia remedy and has shown great success treating those who experience insomnia.

Insomnia may present itself in different ways. For some, the inability to fall asleep is the most noticeable insomnia symptom while others are unable to reach a deep level of sleep and are startled awake by every noise. Any insomnia symptom would frustrate most sleepers, but night after night for months or years, the most serious issues of insomnia accumulate - the daytime effects. These can include physical tiredness, difficulty concentrating and feeling depressed, irritable or lethargic. Oriental medicine is a great insomnia remedy . It focuses on patients' individual insomnia symptom and builds a whole-healing plan from each symptom. It also has been widely successful in treating depression, stress and physical pain.

While these are standard symptoms of a poor night's sleep, they are magnified by chronic conditions and can have severe negative setbacks in a person's life. True insomnia is defined as poor sleep followed by daytime fatigue. Because sleep needs, such as number of hours, varies for different people, the real issue of insomnia is quality of feeling during the day.

Insomnia may have a number of causes, including stress, depression or anxiety; irregular work schedules; medications, drug or alcohol abuse; major life changes; chronic pain, hyperthyroidism or arthritis. Acupuncture and herbs for insomnia have high success rates with each insomnia symptom and can therefore treat insomnia at its root.

A study published recently in the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, reports that patients who received acupressure and transcutaneous electrical acupoint stimulation (TEAS) experienced a significant improvement in their insomnia symptom, including problems of fatigue, sleep quality and depression. The results from this study suggest that acupressure or TEAS might have an important role in managing patients with fatigue, poor sleep quality and depression.

Oriental medicine relates insomnia to the heart. Of course, an insomnia remedy would include a complete diagnosis and treatment system that would focus on each individual, and the many syndromes that are differentiated within the context of insomnia would be explored. Other organ systems and syndromes may be involved, and until the body is brought back into balance through Oriental medicine treatment such as herbs for insomnia and acupuncture, each insomnia symptom will continue.

One contributor to insomnia, stress, weakens the function of the Liver, which in turn affects the health of your nerves. According to the 5 Element Theory, the relationship between the Liver and nerves flows both ways, causing the function of the Liver to be weakened from the accumulation of things that "get on your nerves." Stress-related insomnia is often accompanied by another nerve-induced problem: restless leg syndrome. This can make bedtime even more of a battle for sleep. When your Liver is unbalanced and being asked to deliver energy it does not have, uncomfortable symptoms are your body's way of signaling the need to get things back into harmony, the need for an insomnia remedy .

Acupuncture has a calming effect on the nervous system. It clears obstructions in the muscle and nerve channels, facilitates the flow of oxygen-enriched energy and relaxes the system. Common noted benefits of acupuncture include deeper breathing, improved digestive abilities, better sleeping patterns, decrease in various pains and a general sense of well being, which are all excellent treatments for insomnia. General acupuncture protocol for the treatment of chronic insomnia includes 10 initial treatments at two to three treatments per week, followed by a two to four week observational period and possibly one treatment per week.

Acupuncture Treats Insomnia

Acupuncture and herbs as an insomnia remedy can greatly improve sleeping patterns, but in order to successfully and completely resolve sleep disturbance one must address all the contributing factors. Oriental medicine helps do this by treating the whole person and focusing on bringing the entire body into balance. Other suggested actions include:

Learn to relax physically

Techniques such as yoga, meditation, biofeedback and progressive relaxation, as well as acupuncture and massage, can help your body become more restful.

Have a regular bedtime

If you are not asleep after an hour, get up, go to another room and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy. Don't try to force yourself to sleep.

Reduce food and drinks that increase sleep problems

Heavy meals before bedtime, late afternoon or evening consumption of alcohol, chocolate, tea, coffee and caffeinated soda should be avoided. Consider adding herbs for insomnia to your diet as well.

Keep in shape

Regular exercise helps with stress and reduces fatigue, both of which can exacerbate insomnia. Systems such as Tai Chi or Qigong are gentler exercises that balance staying fit with staying relaxed.

Treat physical problems

If physical pain or discomfort is a factor in the inability to fall asleep, don't put up with it. Acupuncture has proven successful in treating pain associated with arthritis and many other physical conditions.

Nutritional Counseling and Lifestyle Changes

Nutrition can contribute to the cause and cure of insomnia. Excess protein and the over reliance on stimulants and quick-energy foods contribute to fatigue by weighing on the liver, kidneys and intestines. Quick fix foods increase the depletion of the body-mind energy reserves. Tailoring a diet that includes foods such as whole grains, beans, vegetables and fruits to the individual replenishes energy and diffuses built-up stress.

Chinese Herbal Medicine and Supplements

Chinese herbs and herbal medications are also useful in combating insomnia. An Oriental medicine practitioner can recommend an insomnia remedy to best suit individual insomnia symptoms. Herbs for insomnia such as longan fruit, golden thread, sour jujube seed, fossil bone or mimosa bark may be prescribed.

Insomnia should not dictate when or for how long you sleep. It can be frustrating and scary when any disease or disorder takes away control. Oriental medicine will lead you back to a place of balance and calm, giving you the power to lay insomnia to rest.

About the Author

Lily Rogers works for [Pacific College of Oriental Medicine](#)