

# **Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template**

**Title:** Can't Sleep? You May Have Insomnia

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## **Plain Language Summary:**

### **What is Insomnia?**

Insomnia is the inability to fall asleep, stay asleep, or both. It is the most common sleep complaint among Americans and affects up to 10% of the general population. This condition can be short-term (days to weeks) or ongoing (months to years). Insomnia can cause problems such as drowsiness, poor concentration, and lack of energy. These problems can keep you from doing your best at work or school. It can also become a very serious and dangerous problem. For example, it may cause you to feel drowsy while driving and cause you to get into an accident.

### **What causes Insomnia?**

There are many causes that can be related to lifestyle or medications. It can also be caused by certain medical conditions. Most of the time it is a symptom of some other condition. For example, things such as poor sleeping habits, stress, or drug abuse can cause insomnia. Also, medical conditions such as sleep apnea and anxiety can cause insomnia. In these cases, there is another cause for the insomnia that can be treated. There are times when no cause can be found and the patient has what is called "primary insomnia." Primary insomnia isn't due to medical problems or medicines. It is its own disorder, and we don't understand it very well.

### **How can I prevent Insomnia?**

Insomnia can be prevented by using good sleep habits. Good sleep habits include the following:

- Use a clean comfortable bed for sleep and sex only
- Use a cool, dark, and quiet bedroom
- Establish a regular bedtime routine
- Avoid using alcohol to help fall asleep
- Avoid caffeine or tobacco near bedtime
- Avoid loud noises

Other habits that help people sleep include the following:

- Daily exercise
- Avoid napping
- Keep a sleep diary to identify your sleep habits

## **How is Insomnia treated?**

There are many ways to treat this condition. One option would be to change your sleep habits. Another easy way is to consider relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation. When these changes don't help improve sleep, then it is a good time to see your doctor. Your doctor will want to know about your sleep habits and your daily routine. A full evaluation and special sleep tests may also be necessary.

Your doctor will have the option to use medications. There are many medications that can be used to treat insomnia. However, many of them have unwanted side effects. One group of medications is called "sedative-hypnotics." These medications work by acting in the sleep areas of the brain. These medications work very well, but they can cause many side effects. These side effects include memory problems, poor concentration, and feeling "sluggish." Another serious side effect is addiction. There is also a medication called Ramelteon. This medication stimulates a different part of the brain that is believed to help with sleep. Ramelteon has very few side effects. Although this medication is approved by the FDA, there are still only a few studies that have shown that it works well and is safe.

### **Additional Resources:**

National Sleep Foundation:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov.ezp1.lib.umn.edu/health/health-topics/topics/inso/>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute:

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-related-problems/insomnia-and-sleep>

MedLine Plus:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov.ezp1.lib.umn.edu/medlineplus/ency/article/000805.htm>

Mayo Clinic:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/insomnia/DS00187>

### **Key Words:**

Sleeplessness

Tiredness

Insomnia

Fatigue

Restlessness

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