

Q & A Mindline



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Q I've heard about semi-somnia, is it similar to insomnia? Please explain how we can best deal with this condition.

We live a fast paced automated techno driven life, wherein we are constantly bombarded by information. We rest our bodies by lazing around or lying down but find it difficult to 'rest our mind.' Many complain of an inability to stop thinking or ruminating, especially at night, as the mind hovers around irrelevances. Consequently, sleep difficulties are one of the commonest lifestyle ailments afflicting us all.

Semi-somnia is a term introduced by Dr Neil Stanley, a leading sleep expert. It describes persistent low-grade exhaustion due to poor sleep. When afflicted with semi-somnia, you may simply not sleep for long enough because you have too much else to do. Semi-somnia is simply a milder version of insomnia or poor sleep. In insomnia, you may face difficulty in getting sleep (taking longer than 30 minutes) and frequently wake in the night or early in the morning. Some effective ways of dealing with either of this two conditions are as follows.

Learn to 'wind down' and 'retire' to bed.

Actively plan and pursue sleep. This requires discipline and an appropriate serene ambience. Establish 'sleep hygiene' which includes the practice of reducing stimulating drinks like tea or coffee. Chocolate and nicotine should also be avoided. Shower and wear fresh clothes before getting into bed as it will relax you.

Avoid late night eating and try to have your meal three hours before bedtime. Indulge in some relaxing music or read a motivational book. Avoid the usage of electronic devices and internet at night. Ensure your room environment is pleasant to sleep. Consider early evening yoga for relaxation and a technique called progressive muscle relaxation at bedtime (a proven method to tense the muscles whilst in bed, become aware of it and then progressively relax them).

Ensure you get adequate exposure to sunlight during the day, besides regular exercise and activities. Slow down and connect with things around you. Take regular breaks and time off from work, including holidays away from home for rejuvenation. Importantly, avoid carrying work back home or keep off it night time. Try and switch off from work (after leaving your workplace), much like your computer, which would 'hang' if you don't shut it down at night.

Q Why are techies more affected by a sleep problem and how do we deal with this?

Perhaps you are right, because it is noticed that more and more youngsters from the IT industry are afflicted with stress, anxiety and associated sleep disturbances.

Techies spend most of their time with electronic mediums - staring at the computer screen all day and living more in the virtual world, rather than their real

environment. Also, researchers have discovered that electronic devices emit bright lights that confuse the human brain and sleep patterns.

This scenario could apply to many of us as well. Working at the computer day in and day out, bruises the mind, which is already bombarded with information overload it is barely able to handle. Continued internet and social media usage throughout the day and evenings, contribute to a crowded mind and poor ability to relax and unwind.

Techies tend to cater to 'international clients,' hence they are expected to work late hours or in rotating shifts, including late evening shifts and night shifts. So, their schedule often interferes with the body's natural circadian rhythm and hence, they may find it difficult to adjust to the different sleep and wake schedules that results in insomnia or excessive sleepiness.

Sleep disturbance is known to cause irritability, mood disturbances and stress which has a consequential bearing on physical health including high blood pressure and heart problems. Additionally, it accounts for error at work, accidents, and recurrent sick leaves.

Follow the advice in the earlier answer and make sleep a priority. If you work in shifts, prepare your body and mind for sleep. Try to minimize the exposure of light on your way back home to prevent the sunlight from activating your internal daytime clock.

Be consistent with a regular sleep schedule and maintain it even during the weekend. Go to sleep as early as possible, after returning from work and try to get a minimum of seven to eight hours of sleep every day, because remember, sleep is more important than food. So, make it a priority!