Insomnia—Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or awakening too early

People with insomnia experience daytime tiredness, fatigue or lack of energy. Sometimes insomnia has a psychological basis—though physical conditions which cause pain or are associated with reclining can cause sleep problems. Insomnia occurs most frequently as a chronic (long-term) problem among those who have tendencies toward tension, physical complaints and worry.

While most people quickly recover from transient (short-term) stress-related insomnia once the stress lets up, some people begin to worry about their insomnia. These worry-prone people begin to expect sleeplessness, and their anxiety about missing sleep can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Lack of moderate physical exercise, excessive consumption of alcohol, caffeine (in coffee or cola), other drugs and medications or food can all cause sleep problems even ten or twelve hours later.

It can be hard to break the insomnia, but there are a few proven methods:

- Move your bedtime very late past the time when you eventually fall asleep. For example, if you go to bed at 11 but toss and turn until 1 when you finally sleep, begin by going to bed at 1:30. Most people who try this method are able to fall asleep quickly at the late hour and can then begin shifting their bedtime earlier by 20 minutes each night after a few nights.
- Keep to a regular sleep-wake schedule. Go to be and rise at the same time each day. Avoid sleeping late when you stay up the night before—instead maintain your usual wake-up routine to keep on schedule.
- Make sure that noise, light and temperature are right for sleep (wear ear-plugs, a sleep mask, or get an air conditioner, if needed). Write down your worries instead of thinking about them obsessively. If you do not fall asleep in a short while, get up and read or watch TV until you feel sleepy again—don’t stay in bed while sleepless.

If these methods do not work, consider consulting with a professional, since sleep problems can be symptomatic of depression (especially early-morning awakening) or anxiety problems which go deeper.

If you or a someone you care about suffers any of the above symptoms and you would like more information, come in and speak with a professional counselor in the Wellness and Counseling Center, Marshak building, room J-15. All services are free and confidential.