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Sleep and Insomnia

Do you have insomnia?

That seems like a fair question. But it also sounds like a question that implies a disease or disorder, like “do you have pneumonia”? Although “insomnia” is a single word, it is not a disease in the normal sense. “Insomnia” is not a specific problem, but can be a range of problems with a range of different causes. It is a complex problem that involves all aspects of our being (biological, mental, and social). In general, insomnia is the inability to get adequate sleep despite enough opportunity in bed.

The sleeping difficulty you experience may be that you take a long time to fall asleep first thing at night. The difficulty can be with many and long awakenings across the night. It can be waking earlier than intended and not being able to get back to sleep. Or it can be a combination of these difficulties.

But the most important indication that your sleep is not adequate is when you feel exhausted, tired, irritable, and may have trouble concentrating or remembering things. If you have these troublesome daytime symptoms as well as difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep, this book is for you.

Are you alone with this difficulty? How many people experience insomnia?

- ▶ Although it may seem like you suffer insomnia alone, there are a lot of you.
- ▶ Scientifically conducted surveys find that up to 50% of the whole population would have experienced at least a short bout of sleeping difficulty and tiredness during any one year. Some of these individuals go on to develop chronic and severe insomnia with unrelenting impairments to their daytime feelings and functioning.
- ▶ It is perhaps not surprising that these same surveys find that 5-10% of the whole population suffers this more chronic, severe insomnia.
- ▶ In concrete terms this means that there are at least 1 million chronic insomnia sufferers in Australia, the equivalent of ten full-to-capacity Melbourne Cricket grounds, the entire city of Adelaide, or every 15th person in your street.
- ▶ So some night when you are lying awake in bed feeling you’re the only person in the world

with this problem, you could go out into the street and yell, “anybody else can’t sleep”, and you are very likely to find another insomnia sufferer.

- ▶ Sleeping difficulty is the third most frequent problem (behind stomach problems and headaches) reported to general medical practitioners.
- ▶ Another indication of how common insomnia is comes from surveys of the use of sleep medications. Again, about 5% of the population regularly takes prescribed drugs to help sleep with a lot more using alcohol and over-the-counter remedies promising better sleep. So are the 5% taking sleeping pills cured of their insomnia and not the same as the 5%-10% who presently have chronic insomnia? No, most of those taking sleeping tablets still have insomnia! As we will see later in Chapter 15 sleeping pills usually offer only partial symptomatic improvement and only while they are being used. They do not address the causes of the insomnia and are not a cure.

Are there better ways to treat insomnia?

Yes. It is now clear that non-drug therapies provide better long-term improvement of sleep and daytime feelings. This conclusion comes from substantial scientific medical research and increasing clinical experience.

? *Questions?*

We invite you to contact us with any questions relating to the content of this book:

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