

Insomnia Listening Exercise Scripts

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Insomnia: More than just an inability to sleep

A major research project into insomnia at Pennsylvania State University has turned up some interesting facts about sufferers: over 85 percent of the 300 insomniacs studied had one or more major pathological personality indications—depression, obsessive compulsive tendencies, schizophrenic characteristics or sociopathy. For them insomnia was a secondary symptom of more basic conflicts; in short, insomnia is a socially acceptable problem which one can talk about without fear of negative judgments, yet it is often little more than a mask for whatever is really bothering the non-sleeper.

Another interesting thing researchers have found out about insomnia is that a great many people who consider themselves insomniacs are really victims of general propaganda about sleep rather than non-sleepers. For years the common sense advice about sleep has been to get at least eight hours a night. So common is this notion that people who tend to sleep less often become tense and worried. They seek treatment for insomnia because they need only sleep four or five hours a night and simply can't force themselves to sleep longer.

Requirement for sleep varies tremendously from one person to another. It also varies from one day to the next in the same person. Generally, the more stress-filled the day, the more sleep we need. Also, as we get older we tend to need to sleep less. Many high achievers and great minds throughout history have been poor sleepers: Napoleon, Freud and Thomas Edison, for instance. Others, like Einstein, could easily sleep the whole day long.

The amount of sleep one needs is such an individual requirement that it is impossible to set any optimum figure. Sadly, one of the major causes of simple insomnia is worrying about getting to sleep. Experts say that the more easy-going the attitude we take to sleep, the less of a problem we are likely to have with it. If you miss an hour or two a night because you stay up to watch a television show, read a book or finish some work, the chances are you'll more than make up for it in the next couple of days, provided you don't get anxious about it.

Non-somniacs

There's a strange link between Sir Winston Churchill, Napoleon and America's ex-President Ford. It's the twilight world of the people who hardly sleep.

They are not affected by insomnia, where people toss and turn listlessly in bed, take another sleeping tablet that fails to work and appear hollow-eyed in the morning. They are 'non-somniacs'—people who happily sleep less than three hours a night without harmful effects and have an endless capacity for filling the extra time with useful work.

Dr. Ray Meddis, lecturer in psychology in the Department of Human Sciences at Loughborough University, Leicestershire, coined the phrase 'non-somnia' during many years' research.

The condition is rare, Dr. Meddis says: "Many non-somniacs are outstanding members of society, capable of enormous effort. Most manage two jobs, one when ordinary people are usually fast asleep. Non-somniacs rarely have catnaps and they don't feel drowsy before their short sleep. They often nod off and wake up again unaware that they have slept."

Dr. Meddis has found no real common factor among non-somniacs, although he believes the condition may be inherited. Some people have been like it since childhood, others developed the condition in later life.