

Humans have a body clock; this clock tells our body when it is time to eat or sleep (Gamble). With insomnia, the body clock is off, and our brain is up when it should be partially shutting down to let us sleep. Insomnia can be short-term or long-term, but either way it is a big struggle and leads to functional impairment while awake. Insomnia has a lot to do with a person's sleep architecture. Patricia Morrisroe writes in her novel Wide Awake, "[sleep architecture] refers to the overall patterns of a person's sleep—how fast one falls asleep, how long one stays asleep, how often one wakes up, and how that sleep is distributed across the multiple 'stages' of sleep" (Morrisroe). Insomnia affected me personally, and I am drawn to exploring this topic as a way to learn more about why insomnia occurs and how it affects others. Insomnia is the inability to sleep or maintain sleep at night, and is a common and difficult problem.

I had insomnia my freshman year, for basically the whole year. It was a really hard time because I was getting very little sleep, and it was greatly impacting how I functioned during the day. I had a hard time staying awake in class and difficulty focusing, and I had a lot less energy for sports as well. Playing the sports and working hard in school also made me very tired, so I would fall asleep fast and easily with no problem at all. Then, around 3am, I would wake up and could not fall back asleep. I'd lay awake for about two or three hours. During this time, all I did was try to fall back asleep. I lay in my bed, fully awake, and worrying about the stressors in my life, and also worrying about not getting enough sleep. The insomnia, I believe, was caused by anxiety, however all it did was increase my anxiety because I was so worried about being tired. Having insomnia was really difficult for me, and living with it was hard because it made it so difficult to function during the day. Eventually I learned how to make it a little better and coping with it got easier. I made my room very dark and opened the windows so it was slightly cool. I also covered my clock so I would not watch it, worrying about the time going by—this method was probably the most helpful. Lastly, I tried to make my environment as quiet as possible. My family knew about the problem, so I let them know that it was important that no voices or loud noises wake me up in the middle of the night. Thankfully, they were very respectful of my request. They knew I had insomnia because of the many symptoms I was showing.

People with insomnia can have any combination of the following symptoms: difficulty falling asleep, waking up and not being able to go back to sleep, waking up too early, and being tired upon waking. The resulting daytime symptoms are the following: sleepiness, irritability, problems with memory, and/or problems with concentration (WebMD). When I had insomnia, I fell asleep fine, but I woke up in the middle of the night and could not sleep. I was always tired upon waking because I never got enough sleep. I had all of the daytime symptoms too—I was always sleepy and often irritable, and I had problems with memory and concentration in regards to school.

There are several different types of insomnia. First, there is primary insomnia, which is not tied to any other medical issues. There is also secondary insomnia, which is related to another health problem that may be causing discomfort and therefore leads to sleeplessness. There is acute insomnia, which is tied to smaller discomforts, and there is chronic insomnia, which is tied to depression or anxiety, chronic stress, pain, or discomfort. The final type of insomnia is transient insomnia, which is less difficult because it lasts for less than a week (WebMD). Sometimes insomnia can be caused by temporary factors, like jetlag, medications, environmental noise, or extreme temperatures. There are also many medications that may cause insomnia as a side effect. The medications that cause insomnia are used for a variety of different problems, from cholesterol problems to allergies. I had chronic insomnia because it was tied to

my overwhelming anxiety and stress. It is said that with “true insomnia” one has symptoms for at least a month, and the symptoms do not occur along with another sleep disorder, mental disorder, medical condition or substance use (Wikipedia). This is called “true insomnia” because there is not another factor causing it. I believe that any of the above listed types of insomnia is “true insomnia,” however we do have to think of the other factors involved. If we know that the insomnia is caused by some other stress or discomfort, it might give us a way of getting rid of the insomnia. To diagnose insomnia there are several possible steps. One will often have a physical exam, and then the doctor might examine one’s medical and sleep histories. It is also helpful to keep a sleep journal to document how one sleeps and what thoughts may be keeping one up. This helps us keep track of how much sleep we are getting and what thoughts are keeping us up.

There is a big difference in how much sleep we need and how much we actually get. Teenagers generally need about nine hours for full brain performance. In the 1950s, teens were getting an average of eight hours, which is at least close to the amount they need. However, the average amount of sleep that teens are getting in 2013 is six and a half hours. We can blame a lot of this on the technology that keeps our brains going even when it is time to go to sleep. It is also common today that teens will get five hours of sleep, which is only a little more than half as much as they need. Since there is a great lack of sleep, our brains cannot perform as well as they would with a full night of healthy sleep. The biggest factor in how much sleep we get is whether or not we are employed. Jobs take up a lot of time, and they may also cause stress, which may keep us up at night (Foster). When I had insomnia, I would guess that I got about six hours of sleep nightly, which is definitely not enough for me to be able to function well during the daytime. Now I get on average ten hours, which solves many of the problems I had when I struggled with insomnia.

Not getting enough sleep affects us in a negative way. A lack of sleep leads to problems with memory, increased impulsivity, and poor judgment. A tired brain also craves things to wake it up—this may be drugs, nicotine, caffeine, food or alcohol. Too much of any of these things can be unhealthy. People with insomnia also often take sleeping pills, which can easily lead to dependence and addiction (Foster). Sleep and mood are also closely linked. People with depression are at high risk for developing insomnia. It also works the other way around—people with sleep problems are at higher risk for developing an emotional disorder like depression or anxiety. Insomnia can be classified as a psychological issue so it can have psychological problems tied in with it. Difficulty sleeping is often the first symptom of depression. Fifteen to twenty percent of people with insomnia develop depression. I had depression when my insomnia started, which I believe was a factor in why I had it. People who are at risk for insomnia can often be travelers, people who work shifts and frequently change which shifts they are working, the elderly, drug users, teens, pregnant women, women going through menopause, and people with mental health disorders (Medical News Today).

To cope with insomnia in a healthy way, one should consume less caffeine, avoid alcohol and nicotine, exercise, avoid naps, and keep a sleep diary. There are also things that one can do to his or her environment to help one sleep, for example, turning one’s bedroom into a sleep-inducing environment. The best way to do this is to make it a quiet, dark, and cool space. One should not watch the clock while waiting to fall asleep. When I had insomnia, I covered the clock with another object so I would not worry about the time, and so I could simply think about sleeping. Watching the clock seemed to keep my mind awake and busy, rather than just letting it roam. One should exercise, and exercise earlier in the day, not right before going to sleep. Exercise wakes the body up while doing it, but later on makes it tired. It is also proven that

eating lighter evening meals can help with sleep. Finally, one should go to sleep when he or she is truly tired. That will help him or her have a better night's sleep and should help him or her sleep through the night. This is all part of one's "sleep hygiene," or the habits and practices that help one sleep well on a regular basis. I agree with what is being written about how to cope with insomnia because they are all habits that I had to learn as well. I learned to do these things simply by experimenting with what I thought would help me. I found that a lot of the things that are suggested on the Internet and in books really do help with sleep. Much of my information comes from the research of Harvard researchers, along with people who had insomnia themselves, all of which I believe is reliable. However, there is a lot of unreliable information in the world regarding insomnia.

There are many myths about insomnia and sleeping. One is that having a drink before bed is helpful. This is not true because as alcohol moves through a body, it may cause one to have a restless night or to wake earlier. It is also a myth that insomnia is only mental. Psychological issues *can* cause insomnia, but they are not the only things that trigger insomnia—many things can cause it. It is a myth that looking at a screen can help one "wind down" and get a good night's sleep. However, the screen stimulates our brains, and does not help with falling asleep. It is also not true that sleeping pills are risk free. One must always consult a doctor before taking sleeping pills, especially because sleeping pills cannot cure insomnia, although they can help temporarily. The best cure to stress-caused insomnia is resolving other issues in one's life. It is also a myth that one can "make up for lost sleep." Sleeping a lot sometimes and not a lot at other times can mess with the body clock, which makes it harder to sleep the next time. It is healthy to have a regular sleep schedule. It is also a myth that napping helps, because napping in the afternoon can make the brain less tired and ready to sleep when it is time. Finally, it is a myth that a person can learn to need less sleep. There is a certain amount of sleep that each body needs, and everyone is just born with this sleep need. Sleep problems actually do not go away on their own, so if someone is having a sleep problem they should try to figure out what they need to work on or resolve in order to eliminate whatever is keeping them up at night (WebMD).

I know from both personal experience and research that insomnia is a pervasive problem. It is the number one complaint about sleep from Americans, and approximately one third of the population suffers from some sort of insomnia. A survey says that about 30% of American women and 20% of American men take medication to help them sleep. About 60 million American adults have reported insomnia, ranging from temporary to long-term (Study Mode). Insomnia is not just one night of not-great sleep; insomnia is a constant sleep problem that simply will not go away. I am on medicine that treats insomnia and makes me very drowsy once I take it. The thought of coming off the medicine is alarming to me, and I hope that when I do, I do not go back to waking up in the middle of the night. Insomnia is also something that not many people understand. It is not difficult to understand that it means a lack of sleep, however, I believe that no one can understand the true difficulty of it unless he or she has personally experienced it. Insomnia can be a vicious cycle of not sleeping, being grumpy and tired all day, going to sleep, and not sleeping again. Sometimes all one needs to cure the grumpiness and sleepiness is one good night of sleep, but with insomnia that one good night is never possible. I also believe, and know from experience, that insomnia negatively affects quality of life. Not getting enough sleep is stressful, and also makes it very hard to function during the day. When I was struggling with insomnia I was often in a bad mood because I was tired, but there seemed to be no way to fix it, because no matter what I did I could never get a full night's sleep. Insomnia is a difficult problem that I personally struggled with, and that many other people have a hard

time with as well. People should be aware of how insomnia affects others because it is very common.

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