



DREAM HEALTHY

By Narelle Stegehuis

You toss. You turn. Nothing feels right – you can't relax. The sheets are too wrinkled, the blankets too rumpled, the pillows too soft, and you just know you're never going to get to sleep tonight!

"Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together"

Thomas Decker

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Insomnia is a problem that haunts women twice as often as it does men. It may keep us awake for a night or two as we struggle with challenges at work or at home, or it might hang around for several weeks as we work our way through a family crisis or battle with our hormones.

But insomnia isn't just a hard time getting to sleep at night. It can also make you rise far too early in the morning. Either way, the result is that you are just too exhausted to cope with the demands of life, let alone chase its pleasures.

Getting to the bottom of why you can't sleep can be difficult. Sex hormones influence sleep and circadian rhythms, and sleep affects your nervous system, which affects your hormones and so on. Yes, it's a vicious cycle.

As we age our bodies change and so do our hormones. These changes affect our nervous system, influencing our mood, emotional state and menstrual cycle. They have profound effects on sleep quality, daytime functioning and general well being.

Sleep and the Menstrual Cycle/ Premenstrual Syndrome

For those of us who suffer from

insomnia before our period, it is torture! Insomnia related to your period may be related to a fall in progesterone, body temperature changes or painful periods.

Unfortunately, those who suffer from this are potentially stuck with it every month for forty or so years. Alas - Mother Nature can provide a helping hand! I've had great success in practice using herbs, such as Chaste berry, Hypericum, Black Cohosh on patients - to name a few.

Sleep and Menopause

Many women complain of sleep disturbances caused by hot flushes and night sweats during the menopausal transition.

Is your lifestyle keeping you awake?

More than 80% of working women report fatigue and exhaustion, and half of them obtain inadequate sleep. Shift workers with altered sleep and circadian rhythms are at increased risk for menstrual irregularities, early menopause and mood changes. Generally women still remain the main caregivers for children and elderly family members. These responsibilities may add significant stress and burden, and increased vulnerability for sleep disturbances resulting in a negative impact on their health. In addition, significant life events, such as divorce or death of a loved one, have been associated with development of post-traumatic symptoms, including sleep disturbances.

Unfortunately, some women turn to alcohol "to relax them". However this 'little nip on the side' could be making it worse. Alcohol generally leads to

insomnia. So if you are in to this pattern of coping – STOP!

Let Mother Nature nurture you back to sleep

Poor sleep can be a symptom of many illnesses, such as thyroid imbalance, blood sugar imbalance, menopause, depression or other psychological disorders, such as anxiety. In general, see your health professional if you have persistent or excessive insomnia.

Treatment for insomnia should include a strategy to get to the cause of it, rather than simply applying a 'band aid' affect. Part of this could include:

Lifestyle changes

Encourage yourself to slow down and to avoid excessive physical and psychological stress. This may help to calm your adrenals and central nervous system, enabling you to sleep better.

Introduce gradual but steady exercise, such as Pilates

This can help improve oxygenation and stimulate hormones that promote a more restful sleep.

Dietary changes

Support a healthy lifestyle by kicking bad habits, such as eating processed foods and consuming coffee or alcohol. Choose foods that are supportive of what your body needs. Cut out gluten, dairy, pork and sugar, and talk to a practitioner regarding supplements that may help.

Improve your mood

Depression can be both a cause and an effect of insomnia. Herbs such as Hypericum, Oats and B vitamins can help to improve your mood.

If pain is keeping you awake

Try Glucosamine and Fish Oil supplementation.

Improve and support your adrenals and central nervous system

With herbs such as Rehmannia, Withania and Chamomile. Chamomile, Passion Flower and Valerian have been known to successfully treat anxiety and insomnia.

Speak to a practitioner about supplementation

Deficiencies of Calcium, Magnesium, Melatonin and Niacin can contribute to insomnia

So when you're lying in bed at night staring at the ceiling wondering 'what it will take to fall asleep', remember that you are not alone! Most importantly, decide that from this night on you are going to make changes – call an experienced Naturopath or trusted other health practitioner in the morning. Discuss with them lifestyle changes and remedies to balance your hormones, get some sleep and dream you way back to better health. ■

Narelle Stegehuis, CEO of MassAttack, is a Naturopath specializing in the treatment of PCOS, Fibroids, Endometriosis and Thyroid imbalance. Uniquely, her services are offered online. She is both an accomplished writer and recent recipient of the Australian Naturopathic Excellence Award. Download her free e-book "7 Secrets of Weight Loss Revealed" at www.massattack.com.au