

the
Five Fingers
of Insomnia

The Roots of Insomnia Made Simple



Disclaimer:

The information provided here is for educational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Sleep issues can be complex, multi-layered, and vary from person to person. It is encouraged to do your own research on the materials within and strongly recommended that you consult a qualified healthcare professional before making significant changes to your sleep routine, diet, supplements, or medication. The author and publisher disclaim any liability arising directly or indirectly from the use or application of the information contained herein.

Remember: sleep science is continually evolving. Some perspectives shared in this guide draw from emerging research and integrative interpretations of current literature. As with all areas of health, evidence varies in strength, and individual responses differ.

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The Nature of Insomnia: An Introduction

If you're reading this, chances are sleep no longer feels simple. You may be exhausted but wired. Calm one moment, restless the next. You may have tried routines, supplements, breathing techniques, or advice that should have worked—but didn't. And over time, the problem likely stopped feeling like “bad sleep” and started feeling personal.

One of the most important things to understand about insomnia is this: **it is rarely caused by a single factor.**

Sleep is not a switch you flip—it's a state your body allows when the right conditions are present. When those conditions are disrupted across multiple systems—biological, behavioural, psychological, and environmental—sleep becomes fragile.

I learned this the hard way.

After years of struggling with insomnia myself, I spent over five years studying sleep from every angle I could—nutrition, light, hormones, circadian rhythms, stress physiology, and brain activity. What I discovered wasn't that people's insomnia had come out of nowhere, but a pattern: people were trying to fix their sleep without understanding how many forces were quietly acting on them at once.

True sleep, I discovered, wasn't achieved through some clever trick or a fancy new pill; it was about understanding yourself—your rhythms, your lifestyle, your diet, and how to quieten your brain so it would effortlessly ‘switch off’ as Mother Nature intended.

It's no accident that you're struggling right now. If you're like I was, you're simply unaware of the invisible factors affecting you. And trust me—it's not just your mind in the way. And really, it's not your fault! The truth is, you've been sabotaged—without knowing how or why.

I was there. I too suffered night after night, frustrated to not know why I couldn't just turn my brain off and rest. It felt like I was being punished. It took more than five years to get to where I am now. I read books, wrote books, listened to professional sleep experts, made a website, penned a number of PDFs, travelled the world experimenting with different sleep setups and customs, and now I'm here to share all my secrets to you in the simplest, most intuitive, most effective way I know how—so that you can get back to sleep in the fastest, safest, most natural and most reliable way possible.

If insomnia has you in its grasp, you likely downloaded this PDF to discover how to get it to release its hold on you. But this short guide is not meant to “cure” your insomnia. Instead, it's designed to orient you—to give you a simple framework and some perspective on how and why your sleep may be so elusive right now, and which areas deserve your attention first.

That framework is what I call **The Five Fingers of Insomnia**.

This is a conceptual model I developed to make a complex system understandable to a tired brain. Each of the five ‘fingers’ here represents a major area to bring attention to—a general way our biology is affected that can make or break a good night of sleep.

We will go through each of them in turn. And while all five fingers can lead to deep, complex discussions of their own, the goal of this PDF is simply to help expand your awareness around the general principles of insomnia with some basic but powerful solutions that are likely to transform your relationship with sleep.

While this isn't a complete breakdown of everything that could be affecting you, it does provide a summary, a roadmap, to help the majority of sleepers give themselves a strong advantage in navigating their condition.

First, a little on the brain...



Insomnia's Grip on the Brain: The Principles of Rest

Before we knock down the five fingers, it may help to understand the primary principle of insomnia. You may have already guessed it: it's brain activity.

While insomnia is far more complicated when you get into the nitty-gritty, a simplified perspective will see the brain as overactive in the sleepless state. Hormones and brain chemicals will tell you that you're exhausted, but other factors may keep the brain alert. When this happens, something is preventing the brain from transitioning out of its wakeful state and into sleep consciousness. How? Why?

In simple terms, the brain's electrical activity will be increased by 'excitatory' neurotransmitters and decreased by 'inhibitory' ones.

For those who don't know, neurotransmitters are tiny little molecules that jump between brain cells when an electrical message is being sent around the brain. An excitatory neurotransmitter will increase this signalling, while inhibitory ones will decrease it. The rule of thumb when trying to get to sleep is that we want **less electrical signalling**, less brain activity, and so we need to respect the brain's delicate functions so that it can do this by itself.



Much of the problem lies in the society we live in. There are so many things in the world around us, conducting our lifestyles, and unnaturally affecting our biology, that our brain activity is prevented from dimming down when it's time to sleep. Because of all the stimulation in our lives, the brain—kept in the dark, inside the skull—doesn't read the clock or understand that lying horizontally necessarily means it's time to turn off. It's up to us to lead our brains into this relaxed state by doing things behaviourally that will provide the right conditions for sleep. This means being gentle and mindful around how our brains are stimulated in the evenings, eating the right foods, and giving time for ourselves to wind down and chill out.

This is the main principle of restoring natural sleep—to provide the right conditions for the brain to gradually reduce its own electrical activity at the same time every night. This means that **consistent routine and conscious awareness of 'sleep saboteurs'**—meaning anything that can block or interrupt sleep—will help our brain slow down when it's meant to, preventing excess electrical signalling bouncing around after dark. Because, the thing is, we're usually unaware of all the factors generating this electrical activity. We underestimate our own sensitivity, and we don't always realise just how many things in everyday life can influence us.

Adding to this, we might reframe what 'rest' actually means. To wake up refreshed means so much more than getting a nightly eight to ten hours in bed. A fresh, functional brain isn't just the product of adequate sleep time—it's allowing the brain to clean, structure, and reorganise itself properly.

The word here is 'coherence'. This means that the cells in our brain don't just need to rest; they need to be working in harmony again—refreshed and reorganised so that their electrical activity is conducted rhythmically. With trillions of cells in our brain, it's very easy for them to lose timing and rhythm. This creates a very subtle kind of disorganisation (a reduction in neural synchrony), which, through sleep, needs to be resolved and reorganised.

Like an orchestra, a properly functional brain will sound clear and precise when all the musicians are playing together in perfect harmony. Musically, this sounds sharp and beautiful to the ear, like a mind feels clear when it's in perfect order. But, if the musicians get very tired from playing too much, their instruments will begin to drift, and gradually, they will start to lose coordination and play their notes too early or too late. When they lose that timing—even just a tiny bit—the entire performance begins to sound sloppy and confusing, and the harmony of the song becomes just a messy noise.

This is the same inside your brain. If your cells are firing without proper coordination, your mind will feel cloudy, distracted, and without the power and precision of your 'orchestra' playing perfectly together.

But this doesn't just happen if you don't get enough sleep. Some of the Five Fingers contribute to this loss of coherence, nudging the orchestra out of rhythm. Your brain can become slightly 'incoherent' (messy and unsynchronised) like this from eating chemicalised, processed food, drinking alcohol or smoking weed (effects vary by person and dosage), getting stressed, watching too many videos online, or from inconsistent routines. And then, when you go to bed, your brain tries to reorganise itself, but the orchestra is too wildly out of sync already. Instead of a clean, precise, melodic orchestra, your brain becomes more like a circus—with trumpets, elephants and all.

No wonder you can't sleep!



While this is only a loose metaphor and isn't considered the main driver of insomnia, in some cases for some people, certain factors acting on the brain can contribute to this kind of 'messiness' of neural activity that can impact the brain's ability to rest and restore.

So, our goal here is to give our brains a little more respect—treating it as a sensitive system that responds to even the subtlest of signals. During the day, we can make an effort to reduce the behaviours that contribute to this kind of disorganisation in our brains. **Reduce stress and mental demand, eat and drink more consciously, and be more consistent in our routines.**

And during the evenings, in the hours before bed, we can make a special effort to **reduce stimulation**. If the orchestra is too fast and agitated in its playing, it becomes even harder for it to slow down and re-coordinate its timing. We need patience here—and often more relaxation than we think we need.

Like this, we will see that each of the Five Fingers of Insomnia contributes to the brain playing too fast, too loud, or out of sync. When we understand this, our focus shifts from forcing sleep to **restoring rhythm**.



After all, the brain is like a living computer. Equipped with clocks and schedules, it gets automatically programmed by our daily routines—getting ready to wake up or go to sleep when it thinks it's supposed to. As while we might consciously know when we *want* to feel sleepy, if we haven't consistently programmed that brain of ours, its computer clock will not have been adjusted to the right schedule. Unfortunately, we can't adjust these neural timers simply by thinking about it—we need to set its rhythms by having the same schedule every day. Because with every little action we do, our body is listening. Our behaviour stays in silent communication with our biology at all times, training our brain to produce—or not produce—the right sleep chemicals at the right time.

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Because inside our bodies, our biology is a busy landscape of chemical reactions. Every moment of every day, every movement, every thought, corresponds with chemical and electrical activity. Every little action—even the actions of hearing something, seeing something, or eating something—produces heat and energy inside of us. And the more heat and energy we’re producing... You guessed it—the more difficult it is to sleep.

It’s like everything we do lights a little fire inside of us. But even after we’ve put out the fire for the night—that is, we’ve stopped doing our activities, turned off our screens, and finished eating our meals—the coals and embers of our brain and body are still hot. This means we need to slow things down well in advance. No work, no big stimulation. Let the body cool and calm.

This is partly about patience, partly about discipline. But most of all, it’s about awareness: understanding what around us—and inside of us—is lighting these fires. Today, we’re going to be expanding that awareness, taking that first step toward knowing exactly how to soothe that chemical landscape inside. You’ll soon find yourself shifting from asking “Why can’t I sleep?” to “What have I been signalling to my system?”

And soon, you’ll be able to answer that question yourself.





The Five Fingers

The First Finger — Sensory Stimuli

Rules of thumb:

within two hours of bed...

- No bright lights (switch to warm-coloured lights)
- No screens (use blue light glasses or red filter apps)
- No loud sounds (calm, low-volume music is okay)
- No uncomfortable temperatures (cold floors, cold drinks, cold water, or over-hot clothes)

•
Goal: send the brain the message that night has started.

This first finger is one of the most obvious, and one of the most focused-on elements when we're discovering what may be blocking restful sleep. It seems simple: don't shock or overactivate the brain late in the evening.

Strong external signals keep the brain active and on alert—especially through the eyes, ears, and body. Surprises and shocks light the brain up with activity and can start the heart beating faster. But these can also be forms of stimulation that we underestimate in intensity.

We often think that normal house lights and everyday sounds aren't stimulating. Below the consciousness, however, our subconscious brains are staying active. We need to be a little extra careful, therefore, to tone everything down—like we're putting a baby to bed.



Bright lights from LED bulbs or digital screens are usually the biggest culprits—watching TV, computer screens, or tablets or phones. It's super common to have white bulbs around the house too—especially in the bathroom or bedroom. Without getting into detail, it's this white light outside that's keeping the light on inside the brain—long after we've turned the bulb off.

Think about if you were to touch your eye with your finger—how sensitive it is, and how it responds in long-lasting pain to even the slightest touch. This is partly because the eyes aren't just connected to the brain, they're part of it. The eye is one of the most delicate instruments in the body, super sensitive to even the tiniest change in light intensity and colour.

Therefore, we should look to change lightbulbs around the house to warmer, yellower colours (e.g. incandescent bulbs), and even look at purchasing red- or orange-coloured lamps for a dimmer, gentler evening ambience. Here, special lab-made, red-tinted glasses can be supremely helpful, especially if we're adamant that we want to look at screens until late. Applications are also available (sometimes already built into your device) that can filter blue light out for gentler screen use, although these vary in reliability.



The light we see normally contains a whole spectrum of colour, including a range of blue and green wavelengths. Blue and green light are scientifically proven to keep the brain awake, tricking it into thinking it's much earlier in the day. If we cut those out, the brain gets the message that it's sunset (or later), and begins to prepare for sleep. But remember: this preparation takes time. After we reduce the external signals, it can sometimes take an additional two to three hours for the brain to produce enough sleep hormones to transition into sleep.

And it's not just light. Your ears, skin, and even your teeth can be just as sensitive. Loud noises, cold water, icy floors, or upbeat music can all give us bursts and rises in brain stimulation. Everything we feel becomes electrical activity in the brain—but will it be a quiet hum or a lightning storm?

In the hours approaching sleep, we should opt to turn down the volume of our life—and I'm not just meaning music. Everything that sparks engagement or response should be consciously moderated or avoided altogether.

To go a little deeper on this, we'll now explore how it's not always something external that's causing these electrical storms in our head. Sometimes, it's the power of our own mind...



The Second Finger — Mental Activity

Rules of thumb:

- Avoid work and problem-solving
- Avoid planning and organising
- Avoid competition and arguments
- Practise deep breathing
- Reduce general pace of mind and body

If you've laid awake in bed at night with a whirlwind of thoughts churning in your head, you might have simply blamed yourself for overthinking. The stillness of night can be when insecurities resurface, memories from long ago suddenly revisiting, along with expectations, interpretations, and plans.

While this is true and simple enough, you might not be so aware of how mental activity—which seems to be at the centre of everything—can be influenced by every other finger. Senses, physical activity, the activation of your nervous system, as well as what you’ve been eating, drinking, or smoking.

What I’m saying is that your brain may not have started this fire. If you’ve been suffering consistently with insomnia for some time now, and it seems like you’re simply unable to switch off that busy brain of yours, it’s likely the case that your overthinking is a symptom, not the cause. It’s likely something else is causing your brain to stay overactive.

However, in most insomnia cases, there is rarely one single contributor. In your efforts to improve your sleep, addressing your thoughts and mental habits can help to turn the tide in your favour. This means staying calm, being welcoming of sleep, and addressing your fears and anxieties.

This is easier said than done, especially if you now consider your bed a place of suffering or anxiety. Expecting poor sleep can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, putting your brain on edge and preventing deep rest. You’re already expecting to be pained by insomnia!

It’s critical, therefore, to control your perspective of sleep—to not become resentful or anxious about a ‘failed activity’, especially when it’s depriving you of much-needed rest. Sometimes this runs deep in the subconscious, connected with childhood trauma and past discomforts that may have damaged your relationship with sleep. (We will explore this further in the Fifth Finger section.)

But mental activity isn’t only about mindset. Especially if you’re a night owl or evening worker, you might be in the habit of keeping your brain busy when you really ought to be unwinding.

Of course, some people don’t like relaxing. They prefer to work or stimulate themselves in other ways. Nowadays, this usually involves screens: computers, televisions, phones, or tablets.



But whether it's work or play, it's still brain stimulation. Both raise dopamine, which can delay or prevent melatonin release (our main sleep hormone). So, as sleep approaches, we need to take our foot off the accelerator a bit. We need to slow everything down and live a less hurried tempo.

In the two hours before bed, consciously drop to three-quarter speed, then to half speed. Avoid competitive games, deep work, intense media, and emotion-sparking conversations. Take a moment for some deep breaths, practise smiling (even fake smiling helps trick the brain into relaxation), and structure your evening routine to put your mind in a pleasant, relaxed, secure state.



The Third Finger — Physical Activity

Rules of thumb:

- Avoid much exertion 2+ hours before bed
- No intense stretching or head inversion right before bed
- Keep warm skin, but a cool core temperature
- Support the body's comfort and posture in bed

Like mental activity, physical activity can also keep the brain sparking and the body hot. Of course, jolts of movement can require keen coordination and responsiveness of reflex, but physical activity does so much more that can contribute to wakefulness or shallow sleep.

Perhaps the most notable of these effects is that it gets the heart pumping, the blood flowing, and the sweat pouring. It heats the body up, flooding the body with hormones and preventing us from cooling down. And while a warm bed is lovely to get into and a dream to fall asleep in, we often underestimate the body's sensitivity to temperature when we're sleeping. Too hot or too cold, and the body will become restless and wakeful.



Usually, sleep scientists advise that a bedroom on the slightly **colder side** (around 15–19°C / 60–67°F) best supports deep sleep and REM sleep (our main dreaming state). Toddlers and older adults may sleep better in slightly warmer temperatures, while menopausal women may prefer cooler bedrooms. A warm shower can help both with cleanliness and temperature regulation, and can be part of a sleep-friendly routine especially for those who enjoy exercise in the afternoon or evening.

Generally, exercise is fantastic for deep sleep, so long as it's not causing injuries, pain, or body activation too late in the day. It helps us produce the natural painkillers that make bed feel so comfortable, and—with movement and perspiration—helps flush out our system and prime it for sleep. Just make sure it's done during the daytime or at least **two hours before bed**, giving you enough time to calm down and cool down.

Exercise helps regulate the nervous system, use up excess energy, and makes the body more welcome of sleep—as long as it's not in pain. Pain is easily one of the most common disturbers of sleep, and so it's important to look after yourself and find ways to reduce pain and pain-like irritants, such as using supporting body pillows, non-irritating creams, or other pain-management solutions to ensure you're comfortable in bed.

In this conversation, people also often ask about **sex**. For those uninterested in this topic, now's your cue to skip to the next section. For everyone else, let's wade a little deeper.

The science generally says that sexual release is a pro-sleep activity, whether by yourself or with a partner. However, vigorous activity in front of screens or even in the bed can also have wakeful effects for some people. According to sleep hygiene theory, the bed should be reserved for sleep and only sleep. They make an exception for sexual activity because, well... there aren't too many other places that are considered socially acceptable. But logic would state that sex, as a highly stimulating activity, could create associations in the brain between the bed and a time and place to 'get busy'.

Sex—like any form of exercise—can speed up the heart, induce sweating, and heat up the muscles. None of this is good for sleep, and it can add to a build-up of sweat and bacteria. However, this is counterbalanced by the relaxing, pleasurable release of hormones, opioids, and endorphins in the body, as well as the soporific effects of human-to-human touch. Naturally, how sex affects you can vary depending on the person, location, climate, activity, and the relationship.

It's almost the same with solo activity. While going at it alone can have both the pros and cons of two-person activities, it's considered more likely to wake you up, especially if coupled with intense mental or sensory stimulation (like bright screens).

For these reasons, you may consider avoiding these activities at night, doing them in the morning instead or during the daytime—and perhaps even outside the bedroom.

Outside of sex, regular, moderate exercise or movement is recommended every day or every second day. Don't overdo it, though—injuries, tension, or sensitivities can keep your sleep light and unfulfilling. Remember that physical events and experiences manifest in the body as hormones and electrical signals, so the way you treat your body is also how you're treating the state of your brain.





The Fourth Finger — Diet & Chemicals

This is another deep and complex world we will only scrape the surface of. To avoid uprooting the entire iceberg, we're going to sweep through this subject quickly and by principle, looking at the nastiest of ingredients, habits, and chemicals that we should make sure to avoid, while also making mention of how and when we're eating could be contributing to restlessness.

First, what could we be eating—or not eating—that could be holding us back from that juicy, deep sleep we're craving?

Some things are far more obvious than others, and you're likely already aware to some degree of the sleep-disruptive effects of substances like caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine. You may have even heard of large, heavy, or bloating meals too close to bed keeping your system awake. Managing these properly with sufficient respect for the strength of their impacts is likely your first port of call, although it usually takes deeper, more specific insight to understand how truly disruptive poor timing and food choices can be to your sleep. Simply having heard of them is usually not enough to motivate and guide a habit change. This may be your call to go deeper...

But in the world of sleep diet, there are also many **hidden ingredients** that could be sabotaging you without you knowing. If we return to our earlier discussion of brain activity and 'coherence'—our brain's ability to function cleanly and in coordination—it becomes clear that ease of sleep, and the refreshment it brings, arise from a brain operating in harmony. But if this time we imagine the brain as a finely tuned electrical network, we might ask what happens when unpredictable new signals and unfamiliar chemicals enter the electrical traffic—adding sparks and activity just when we're trying to dim the electrics. With other disruptors, we could compare their influence to turning up the volume, or creating radio static that makes it more difficult for clear, functional signalling to take place.

In simple terms, we are changing the electrical behaviour in the brain by affecting what chemicals are present. While even natural foods can have this effect on our brain function, when it comes to careless consumption, it's the synthetic chemicals that are among the most notorious in sleep disruption.

The Big Three of these includes artificial **colours**, artificial **sweeteners**, and artificial **flavour-enhancers**. They are known to contribute to a number of health issues, including anxiety, overstimulation, and ADHD-like symptoms. Not everyone reacts the same way. But if sleep has been difficult, reducing these inputs is a low-risk experiment that can provide useful information about your own sensitivity.

Some examples:

Colours:

Red 40 (Allura Red), Yellow 5 (Tartrazine), Yellow 6 (Sunset Yellow), Blue 1.

With some of these beginning as industrial textile dyes or coal tar extract, artificial colours have a reputation for affecting mood and behaviour—especially in children. They are super potent, found everywhere, and have been observed in some individuals to disrupt the system for days. Any food you're eating with an unnatural colour could be harbouring disruptive chemicals and should be investigated.

Danger Foods: Coloured drinks, cereals, candy, desserts and baking, sauces, cheap cheese and cheese flavouring, 'instant' foods...

Sweeteners:

Aspartame (E951), Sucralose (E955), Saccharin (E954), Acesulfame-K (Ace-K / E950)

The no-sugar trend has brought in something even worse. "Diet" and "zero-sugar" options are often laced with these chemicals that can affect brain coherence and gut health. Sleep disruption is thought to last up to 24 hours in some cases.

Danger foods: "Diet or "zero sugar" or "sugar-free" products, low-calorie desserts, low-carb products, gums, protein powders, snack bars, flavoured water and electrolyte drinks, sugar substitutes (e.g. Splenda, Equal, Sweet'N Low)...



Flavour-Enhancers:

MSG (monosodium glutamate / E621), Yeast Extract / Hydrolysed Vegetable Protein, Disodium Inosinate (E631), “Natural Flavours” (a broad term you should be suspicious of)

Some flavour enhancers act like excitatory neurotransmitters. Too much of them can flood the gut, nervous system, and possibly brain with activating signals, causing restlessness, headaches, tension in the jaw or face, and other strange symptoms for up to ten hours.

Danger foods: Chinese takeaways, instant noodles and soups, flavoured chips and snacks, stock cubes, pre-made meals, processed meats, packet seasonings and sauces...

A simple rule for sleepy brains

If a product is:

- **Brightly coloured**
- **Sugar-free but sweet**
- **Hyper-flavoured**
- **Umami-flavoured** (e.g. instant noodles)
- **Highly processed**
- **And/or marketed as fun, intense, or “zero”**

...it's probably **anti-sleep**...

But wait, there's more...

You can be kept awake by lots of things in the world of sleep. Too much pickled or fermented food, too much protein at night, too much spicy food, foods that make you gassy or bloated, foods high in histamine, or other heavily chemicalised foods. Some ingredients will keep your system activated if eaten in the hours before bed, while some of the man-made chemicals we unconsciously consume can build up over years. If you suspect your diet is causing unusual symptoms, such as headaches, indigestion, anxiety, or overactivity, you may benefit from further reading on this subject.

Key nutrients

Sleep diet is not only about what you are eating, but sometimes what you're not eating. An imbalanced diet where certain food groups are being left out can be depriving you of key nutrients—especially diets high in unnatural, processed foods. As a quick tip, it's recommended to be getting enough tryptophan, magnesium, omega 3, and vitamin D, which can be produced easily and abundantly from natural sunlight —‘eating’ with your skin.

Breakfast

A big breakfast rich in **healthy fats and proteins** is often recommended by clinicians, rather than sugars and carbs. This helps your stress levels stabilise and provides the right nutrients for getting to sleep later that evening. Light foods, like toast, fruit, or cereal, are fine in moderation, but eaten alone can spike your blood sugar, cause crashes, and compound with other stressors that make sleep difficult later on. Adding some proteins and fats to your morning sustenance will help smooth out your biological rhythms—especially if you're a caffeine lover. Egg, avocado, dairy, or even some meat from last night's dinner can help you power into your day with stability and long-lasting energy.



Timing

It's all too common for late eaters to have greater difficulty getting to sleep. This is because it's delaying mealtimes in this busy life can lead to later bedtimes, which consequently means our chronobiology (our internal clock) is confused or misaligned. While consistency is one of the single most important factors of healthy, effortless sleep, it's often considered just as important—if not more so—not to eat too close to bedtime. An active digestive system means that the body's gears are still turning, greater heat is being produced, and the chemical activity of the body can make it harder for the brain to shift fully into sleep. Muscles are contracting, hormones are signalling, blood is pumping, and the gut is in constant communication with the brain. For this reason, it's better to eat your last meal a full three hours or more before sleep.

Supplementation

When it comes to supplementation, common options chosen for sleep support include high-quality **magnesium** (e.g. threonate or glycinate) for nervous system support, **creatine** (earlier in the day) and **omega 3** for brain function, **glycine/collagen** for temperature regulation, **L-theanine** for anxiety, and **vitamin D**. Some supplements can have negative effects for sleep, especially if taken late in the day or in higher doses, such as iron and certain B vitamins.

Responses to supplements vary widely between individuals, and what helps one person may do little for another. Quality, dose, timing, and personal health history all matter, so it's wise to discuss any new supplement with a qualified professional.

Drugs & Pills

But your 'diet' in some ways isn't just limited to food. In the conversation of what we're putting into our body, poor sleep also has many associations with substances—legal and illegal, prescription, recreational, or functional.

This includes coffee, alcohol, nicotine, and a whole host of prescription medications. While we're not going to go deep on these substances today, I will point you to other resources where you can go deeper. The key is to be mindful of anything you're taking that is affecting your mind or brain function—even a little bit. Even sleeping pills over time can change how your brain works, and can sometimes make sleep even more difficult in the long run.

Even sleeping pills are not without their negative effects. While these may seem like a quick and easy fix, over the long term they can affect your brain's responsiveness to sleep signals and make sleep even more difficult. Not only do they carry other damaging side effects, but they are not even providing true, restful sleep.

If you've been on sleeping pills and are looking for change, consider reading my PDF for getting off pills and reclaiming natural sleep. You can find **"The Sleeping Pill Survival Guide"** on my website:

www.thesleepyemporium.com/information

Stress Contributors

Cortisol and dopamine are two chemicals we produce within our body that can hold us back from deep, restful, uninterrupted sleep. They can prevent us from getting to sleep in the first place, or they can wake us up in the middle of the night.

Stimulants—especially taken on an empty stomach—can raise our biological stress markers early in the day, and set off a chain reaction that can continue the rest of the day and last deep into the night. But this isn't just about coffee and cigarettes. We can raise our stress hormones simply by eating specific foods at specific times—or by not eating at all.

This can go beyond just meal choice. They say you are what you eat—and this applies to the mind just as much as the body. Arguments, work, obligations, scary movies... Whatever you put into your brain or your stomach can trigger the body to stay alert and tense.

Finding Your Pattern

After everything, there is very little absolutism or universality when it comes to diet. Nutrition research is complex and evolving, and individuals often discover their own patterns through careful observation. Reducing highly processed or additive-heavy foods is a low-risk step many people find helpful. For any major dietary changes or supplementation, it's wise to seek professional guidance.

For further information on diet, supplementation, routine, and strategy, your recommended next step is to read PDF "Eat Yourself to Sleep" — found on the Sleep Alchemy website.



The Fifth Finger — The Reactionary System / The Subconscious

The fifth finger concerns the components of our subconscious. It's about our automatic, unthinking reactions and unprocessed emotions that are stuck in our body.

The body is a fascinating machine. Its parts are so deeply interrelated that it's impossible to truly untangle or consider a single part 'at fault' for sleep disruption. In truth, when we're talking about emotions, memories, and trigger points, we're talking also about our nervous system, fascia, and a number of brain regions that play a part in our automatic behaviours, reactions, and thinking patterns.

On the subconscious level, our body and brain operate on systems of automatic response. We don't think about how or why—we just do. From birth, early childhood, significant events in our past, or even just as programmed responses, our brain can perceive unassuming events, items, people or places as threats or something to react disproportionately to. Without even realising it, these subconscious connections characterise many of our life perceptions, and we become unreasonably fearful or avoidant of things we really have no need to be.

For example, if you accidentally stood on a nail hidden in a grassy lawn, your foot might jolt away in pain—cut, bleeding, and painful. You would likely have to nurse your foot back to health for a while, perhaps even having to heal from a nasty, long-lasting infection. Afterward, you might naturally be on your guard, suddenly vigilant for more nails that could possibly be hiding in the grass. While logically, you will conclude that stepping on a nail in this lawn was highly unusual and unlikely to happen again in the same way, your mind still stays on guard, and you feel like you can't walk in the grass now without being worried about hidden surprises.

In this way, we become easily programmed by things that have affected us in the past. It could be a childhood trauma—as is quite commonly related to chronic insomnia—or our system might think it's under attack chemically.



We could simply be holding a lot of tension in our body, from things as simple as exercise, sports, work stress, bad posture, or negative thinking. Even a tight jaw can be sending constant signals to our brain, telling it, “Hey, something’s not right here. Keep your eyes open.”

Being a little attached, the brain trusts the body. It stays awake, producing chemicals so that its circuits stay active, screaming, “Don’t turn the lights off just yet!”

But it’s not necessarily the brain’s fault. It could be receiving signals from other parts of the body. Emotions can become trapped all around the body—in the nervous system, muscles, and the fascia—a responsive network of scaffolding inside our body.

For simplicity, let’s refer to any programming here—conscious or subconscious—as trauma. Trauma can be something big and life-changing—an event whose impacts you consciously remember and consider. However, it can also be something subtle, unrecognised, or forgotten. We won’t get too deep into the technicalities in this document, but we will consider the principles of being reactionary when it comes to sleep.

The basic idea of trauma and its impacts on sleep disruption can be specifically bedroom- or sleep-related, or it could be something unrelated that simply keeps the body or mind on edge.

For example, one study showed that 93 percent of soldiers recently returning from war with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) had a significant sleep disorder. In the general population of people with PTSD, sleep issues are still thought to affect up to 70 to 90 percent.

In fact, in one clinical sample of people diagnosed with chronic insomnia, 54 percent had PTSD symptoms. However, none of these people had been officially diagnosed, and none were receiving treatment.

Shockingly, up to 84 percent of patients with insomnia had experienced some kind of traumatic event. **For 12 percent of those patients, their insomnia had begun in childhood, while 27 percent started in their teenage years.** Across further studies, it's been found that people who had had four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were two to three times more likely to suffer with insomnia symptoms later in life.

By principle, we can understand that the nervous system and brain become programmed to be permanently ready for self-protection. Especially if the household or bedroom of a child becomes unpredictable, dangerous, or is associated with other negative emotions, this becomes ingrained in the experience and expectations of a person as they grow into adulthood. Even if they take supplements, have perfect sleep hygiene, do all the right things, the brain refuses to let its guard down.

The simple truth is, we need confidence in our sleep environment and housemates. We need to be able to feel absolutely safe and secure in order to transition into our most vulnerable state—deep sleep. Even subconsciously, if the brain feels it needs to stay alert or ready for something, it's not going to easily switch off. It's learned from experience that going to sleep in this place at this time is not truly safe. Even strong doses of sleeping pills may eventually become ineffective (for some people) as they battle with the brain's will to protect itself.



These events don't have to be as extreme as a dangerous person entering your bedroom while you're asleep—although that, too, is surprisingly common. A sleep-disrupting trauma could be as simple as a strict parent coming in at unpredictable times, or when you're deeply asleep, to wake you up suddenly. It could be a fear of the dark you had as a child. It could be almost anything for a sensitive child or teenager, whose valuable rest was disrupted or encroached on.

It doesn't necessarily need to be an event from your past, either. Your body can still become entrained in adulthood to stay alert and responsive. It could be that you've been on-call for work, accountable to a child, or there has been a point of constant annoyance that won't let you enter a state of deep rest. It could, in fact, be your previous bouts with insomnia that has created negative associations with sleep in your brain.

For whatever reason, if you've begun to associate your bed or your bedroom with agitation, activity, fear or nervousness, then it's your relationship with sleep that has been damaged.

As mentioned earlier in this section, it can help to seek physical therapy to help ease your muscles, fascia, and nervous system back into a sleep-ready state. Massage, acupuncture, acupressure, chiropractic, or other therapies could be a game-changer in helping your body relearn to soften and relax.

However, the mind and body are deeply connected, and it's important not to underestimate this. Tension in the mind can manifest as tension in the body, as body tension can also affect the mind. Ideally, we will address both simultaneously in our journey to better sleep.

While I've created other resources for people specifically looking to address their trauma, anxiety, stress, and other negative mentalities or associations with sleep, I wanted to offer this document as a short read for people who aren't sleeping well and don't know why. But even for those who have had insomnia since childhood or adolescence, I just want to say: you can sleep.

Whatever life's thrown at you before, you're still here, still soldiering on. You've survived 100 percent of your worst, most difficult days—and that says something powerful about you. It may not be easy or quick to overcome the deep effects of experiences from the past, but better sleep may not be as impossible as you might think.

If you suspect there's something from your past that is affecting your sleep today, you may consider making special efforts in the evenings to relax both body and mind. Certain products like weighted blankets or teddies have been shown to help calm the nervous system and subconscious mind, increase oxytocin, and support a happy, relaxed state. You may find that locking your door at night gives you some extra peace of mind, as can use of mantras: telling yourself out loud that you're totally safe, secure, and content.

Above all, take it easy on yourself. Be kind to your body, and speak gently to yourself. Modern neuroscience shows that little efforts like these can make a lot of difference, rewiring your subconscious so it allows itself to relax again. Little acts of self-care, extra comforts and investments in your sleep environment, and even the physical act of smiling will all send messages to your body and brain that will shift your internal chemistry in favour of sleep.



Common Insomnia Types

Insomnia and sleep issues take different forms—and for different reasons. But, there are some common patterns that might resonate with you and your situation. This isn't a perfect model or method for self-diagnosis, but it may provide a clue for the next step you can take on your journey. The deeper you go, the better you will be able to understand what's affecting you and how you can address it.

You don't need to explore everything at once. Most people benefit from starting with the area that feels most familiar or relieving—not the one that feels most intimidating. You can't 'do this wrong'. Understanding grows layer by layer.

Remember: These are not prescriptions. They're invitations to learn more. Sleep issues can often be complex, multi-layered, and personal. Some things may resonate, while others won't. Remember also that this isn't a race, it's not a competition, and you don't need to fix anything today. Take your time, read at your own pace, and give yourself permission to pause, slow down, and stop 'trying'. Sometimes, sleep comes easiest when you surrender to acceptance of whatever your night brings.

The Overthinker

“Tired but wired”

Pattern / Symptoms:

- High bedtime stress
- Long time to fall asleep
- Brain won't switch off
- Alert at night but tired in the morning



Are you a busy-brain? If the symptoms above resonate, chronic stimulation, anxiety, or emotional baggage are your likely sleep saboteurs. Your path to better sleep could lie in better daytime and pre-sleep routines, self-care and mental offloading practices, and more calming interactions and environments. However, there may also be a dietary component, and it may be wise to cut out stimulants like caffeine and check the ingredients on food and drink packaging. Give yourself some proper wind-down time in the evenings; try out some meditation or low-stimulation activities, and tune your nervous system away from "fight or flight" and toward "rest and digest", which could include certain forms of therapy—both mental and physical (e.g. massage or acupuncture).

Recommended next steps:

Check in with your routines and diet. Get stricter with yourself over your use of technology, become more conscious around how you're stimulating yourself in the evenings, and make an attempt to be gentler with yourself—what responsibilities you're taking on, the kind of self-talk you're doing, and how you're looking after yourself. A sleep journal, personal diary, and/or a small handful of supplements are likely to give you an edge here, as will proper lighting and a sleep-conducive sleep environment. You may also look into red-light therapy, which can be a little pricier but very effective.

This type of sleeper is most likely to benefit from reading the following PDFs:

1. Eat Yourself to Sleep: Diet, Snacks & Eating Routines for Smoother Sleeping

2. Sleeping Through: Stress, Anxiety, and Trauma

The Restless Body

“Fragmented sleep; restless nights”



Pattern / Symptoms:

- Falls asleep fine
- Multiple wakeups
- Light, broken sleep
- Often temperature, alcohol, or late food involved

Are you a light sleeper? Do you keep waking up in the night or find it difficult to get comfy? There could be a number of factors impairing your nights, from diet to stress to your sleep environment. Stimulants, depressants (e.g. alcohol), or tension in the body or mind could be interfering with sleep depth, and/or giving you cortisol spikes in the very early morning. Here, self-care practices and a healthier diet could help significantly. Make sure your bedroom is cool, dark, and device/wi-fi-free. High-quality, clean sheets made from natural fibres are likely to improve your situation dramatically, and some massages, stretching, and light daytime exercise may help your body find better comfort during the night. Ensure you're eating a balanced, natural dinner—not too close to bedtime, and without any alcohol. High-fibre dinners, gassy foods, or other gut-disrupters could also be contributing.

Recommended next steps:

Check in with your diet and bedroom conditions. Avoid alcohol, excess caffeine, and the food additives mentioned in this PDF. Put some extra effort into daily routines, having a decent breakfast, ensuring adequate body movement during the day, getting regular exercise, and releasing built-up energy and body tension. It could also be time to invest in better sleep kit: high-quality sheets, a decent sleep mask (or blackout curtains), and a way to regulate temperature and humidity.

This type of sleeper is most likely to benefit from reading the following:

- 1. Eat Yourself to Sleep: Diet, Snacks & Eating Routines for Smoother Sleeping**
- 2. Catching the Sleep Train: Strategies for Getting to Sleep & Staying Asleep**
- 3. Sleep Energetics: Sensitive Tools for Sensitive Sleepers**

The Night Owl

“Late to bed; hardly consistent”

Pattern / Symptoms:

- Bedtimes vary widely (often late)
- Wake times inconsistent
- “Jetlag without travel”
- Some good nights, some awful, unpredictable mornings



Are you an animal of the night, a creature of the dark? It's likely you thrive in the late hours of night, but it could also be holding you back from proper routine and rest. The Night Owl is associated with the "Wolf" chronotype. This is common for creative individuals, workaholics, and social butterflies—or those who delay sleep, seeking solitude or escape from life. Often paired with substance consumption, such as caffeine, cannabis, or alcohol, it could also be bright screens and stimulating activities that are keeping your brain buzzing until sometime long after midnight. It's likely you've become disconnected from your natural circadian rhythms. Greater control of your dopamine, routine, and questionable habits could be your best path to reclaiming your sleep.

Recommended next steps:

Fall in love with routine again. Give yourself a big, beautiful breakfast and do something valuable, enjoyable, or stimulating in the mornings. Anchor your routine with specific activities at specific times. Stabilise your rhythm in order to stabilise your biology, and consider working on your habits, addictions, and chosen activities. Implement control strategies to reduce attachment to and dependence on substances, including use of screens and devices. Products that help to reduce the effects of technology on the brain (e.g. blue light glasses; EMF protection devices) are likely to help, while a sleep journal could help you to improve awareness of your routines.

This type of sleeper is most likely to benefit from reading the following:

- 1. Catching the Sleep Train: Strategies for Getting to Sleep & Staying Asleep**
- 2. Sleeping Through: Stress, Anxiety, and Trauma**

The Conditioned Insomniac

Pattern / Symptoms:

- Difficulty began years ago, often in childhood or adolescence
- Problems both falling asleep and staying asleep
- Long history of trying things
- Likely medication attempts
- Strong fear or frustration about bedtime
- Nights may average 3–4 hours
- Effort to sleep is high; trust in sleep is low

This type speaks to the veteran insomniac—someone who’s likely been suffering for years, has “tried everything”, and/or has been on significant medication protocols. With this depth and persistence of sleep troubles, it’s unlikely that a simple change of diet and routine is going to provide much relief, as your relationship with sleep has been severely damaged. While certain activities and routines can help, to reclaim natural, restful sleep, it’s likely we’re going to need to go a little deeper—exploring real events of your past, the sensitivities of your psychology, and what sleep and bedrooms represent symbolically. Often, there is a kind of trauma present, conscious or subconscious, that is playing a part, and sleeping pills taken over long periods could have made this worse.

Recommended next steps:

As a foundation for reclaiming your sleep, it’s recommended to master the basics: proper diet and routine, and a secure, comfortable sleep environment. Certain supplements and self-care protocol (including physical therapies) should help to regulate the nervous system. Ultimately, you may need to go a little deeper to address how your past could be affecting you today—not for complete resolution, but to begin to consciously repair your relationship with sleep so that you feel completely safe and comfortable.

This type of sleeper is most likely to benefit from reading the following:

- 1. Sleeping Through: Stress, Anxiety, and Trauma**
- 2. The Sleeping Pill Survival Guide**



Final Message:

The biology of sleep is more complex than you could imagine—but that doesn't mean the process has to be. With just a few tips, tricks, and insights, you can make huge progress in reclaiming lost ground. It can take weeks or months—and in some persistent cases, longer—to repair a damaged relationship with sleep. But with the right information on your side, you can begin today.

This PDF has drawn your attention to some of the most common ways your sleep can be impacted. It's not a full breakdown or strategy guide, but it will open doors to further learning, pointing you in the right direction so you can understand yourself better and what might be holding you back from deep, natural sleep.

Through everything, my best advice is to remain calm when you don't get the sleep you want. Don't feed the fire with frustration or let your mindset give in to hopelessness. Trust in the process and play the long game, appreciating small, gradual improvements as you continue to learn, adapt, and reframe.

Remember: your biology is intelligent and flexible. Even if it's been a long time since you've had a decent night of sleep, it will be just as enthusiastic as you to get some proper rest if you let it.

And therein lies the key. Your mind and your body are deeply connected, and one will always affect the other. Their ability to rest depends on whether your biology—what's going on chemically inside of you—is ready to surrender to relaxation. Your mentality matters a lot, as does diet, sunshine, exercise, and the right sleep environment.

I invite you to go deeper now. Learn more about sleep biology, psychology, and strategy on the Sleep Alchemy website. For further reading, I recommend browsing more of the Sleep Alchemy PDFs, or take on the sleep guidebook “I Can't Sleep: A Condensed Guide to Reclaiming Your Sleep”. There, you'll learn everything you need to know to get back to effortless, natural sleep.

If you enjoyed this PDF or found it helpful, please consider leaving a review to help us reach more people and spread the good word of natural sleep.

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