

# Investigating insomnia as a form of sleep disorder psychology essay

[Health & Medicine](#), [Sleep Disorders](#)



Sleep. Everyone spend a third of their lives doing that, but why? Logic says that the brain demands it. Everyone gives in to it, no matter how hard they try to resist. A lot of attempts have been made to understand sleep. But the problems of sleeping patterns are equally important too. Approximately a fifth of Americans complain about problems sleeping. The consequences of sleep disorders are dire. Twenty percent of all serious motor vehicles accidents are associated with driver sleepiness. Work productivity is reduced even more. These disorders might even damage relationships and hinder one from enjoying life to the fullest. In February 2009, a commuter jet on the way to Buffalo from Newark crashed, taking 50 lives with it. The National Transportation Safety Board concluded the cause of the crash is that the pilot's performance " was likely impaired due to fatigue." Harvard's Charles Czeisler , who conducted a study on 2700 first-year medical residents, said that " one in twenty first-year medical residents admits to making a fatigue-related mistake that resulted in death of a patient." Sleeping disorders is a serious problem that plagues the human race in many ways. They come in various forms, robbing the masses of a good-night's sleep. For example, night terrors – a state of panic experienced while asleep- escalate during a child's preschool year. A person with night terror may suddenly sit up, looking terrified. They usually scream, sweat and might even swing their arms around at some imaginary attacker. Another example of sleeping disorder is sleep walking, which plagues about 20 percent of the population. Sleep walkers might seem harmless as they only walk around while they are asleep. But in some extreme cases, sleep walkers has been known to be extremely violent, even resulting in murder. Sleep apnea- the obstruction of

a person's airway during sleep- is related to increased risk for stroke and heart attacks. It is also a big source of income for sleep center business. Lastly, narcolepsy, a kind of " sleep seizure", affects one in every two thousand person. Narcoleptics might fall asleep at any moment while engaging in daily activities such as driving and cooking. Imagine suddenly falling asleep while you are driving. These are only a few of the common sleeping disorders.

Then, there is insomnia. Insomniacs are people who can't fall asleep, can't stay asleep, or get a good quality of sleep. Insomnia is related to a wide array of conditions. Some of them has restless legs syndrome (RLS) – an intense discomfort in their limbs that prevents them from falling asleep. Narcoleptics have trouble with staying asleep and staying awake. Some women can't sleep well during their periods. Even exercising can induce insomnia. Some insomniacs can't sleep because they are worried about work, school or other things. In the recent economic crisis, one-third of Americans report that they have lost sleep. Excessive or lack of certain neurotransmitters is also known to cause insomnia. More than 30% of the population suffers from insomnia. It is a widespread sleeping disorder that is surprisingly underrated. Majority of medical school students has no more than four hours of training on sleeping disorders. The National Institutes of Health contributes roughly \$230 million a year to sleep research – around the same amount the famous manufacturers of sleeping pills Lunesta and Ambien spend in one season on television advertising in 2008.

Maybe the reason for sleep deprivation is because that people have forgotten how to sleep. In ancient times, cavemen slept when it's dark and woke up when the sun rises. They are biologically programmed to do so. During the day, they would forage and hunt. When the sunsets, darkness follows. The temperature would gradually decrease with the absence of the sun. Being warm-blooded mammals, they would seek out shelter to avoid the perils of the cold dark night. Besides that, they can't do much if they can't see well at night. So, they sleep. During winter months though, they may have broken up their sleep into chunks. People in developing countries still often sleep this way. Carol Worthman and Melissa Melby of Emory University published a comparative survey of how people sleep in different cultures. For example, they found that "the boundaries of sleep and waking are very fluid" among groups such as the !Kung and Efe. For the regular insomniacs of today though, it might just be that they take sleep for granted. Normally, teenagers are biologically programmed to wake up late. But they are required to wake up early to attend school. Night-shift workers are fighting the circadian rhythm when they are sleeping in the morning. Many people might also party into the night, neglecting the ancient calling of slumber which enables their body to rest. In today's modern era, most people are neglecting the ancient rhythm of sleep.

There are different ways to classify the types of insomnia. Insomniacs can be split into two different groups. There is the primary insomniac, which means a person whose insomnia is not directly related to any other health conditions. There is also secondary insomnia, which is caused by a specific

medical condition. Besides that, insomnia can also be classified according to their severity. They are transient insomnia (which last for less than a week), acute insomnia (which last for less than a month and chronic insomnia (which last for more than a month). These are the common types of insomnia out there.

Then, there is the special type of insomnias. Psychophysiological insomniacs are people who either can't sleep or can't stay asleep for no evident reason. These are the people that worry too much about sleep, which causes even more tension. When a normal person relaxes when it's close to bedtime, psychophysiological insomniacs gradually become even more stressful. According to John Winkleman, medical director of the Brigham and Women's Hospital's Sleep Health Center in Brighton, Massachusetts, psychophysiological insomniacs makes up about 25 percent of people who goes to sleep clinics. Sleep deprivation causes them to be very exhausted during the day. They may try to stay awake by consuming caffeine, which will have adverse effects on their sleep quality at night. Normally, this type of insomnia can be treated with a two-way approach. Firstly, doctors might prescribe sleeping pills. Most of these pills enhance the activity of GABA (a neurotransmitter that regulates the overall excitability of the nervous system). It might sound like a good way to deal with the problem, but these drugs can lead to psychological or physical addiction. " Sleeping pills are not a natural way to sleep", says Charles Czeisler. These pills might even negatively affect one's sleep in the long run. The second way to treat psychophysiological insomniacs is by utilizing cognitive behavioral therapy

(CBT). A psychologist applying CBT would first condition your way of thinking – which is the cognitive part- and then he or she would condition your actions – which is the behavioral part. This form of psychotherapy tries to improve the patient's current state of mind, affecting the patient to think that his or her problem is solvable, and to exercise good sleeping behaviors. For example, go to bed only when you are sleepy, do not sleep in a brightly-lit room, don't try too hard to sleep. A study by the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre (BIDMC) and Harvard Medical School has shown that CBT is more effective than sleeping pills in treating chronic on-set insomnia. So the good news is these insomniacs might just have to loosen up to get a good night's sleep.

Moving on, there is a more extreme case of insomnia that can lead to death, the fatal familial insomnia (FFI). It is a rare genetic disease (known only in 40 families around the world), as its name suggest, that causes sleeplessness. Imagine that you are a patient with FFI. One day during your 50-year-old life, you suddenly can't sleep well through the night. Naps have become an impossible task. You desperately to shut your eyes and enter the sleeping state than your body yearned for so long. But inside your brain, the sun that keeps you awake will never set. When this disease strikes, it normally lasts about a year, and then, death. If you are really unlucky, you might slip into a coma, but you would still be fully awake and suffer the torture of sleeplessness until the day that your life fades away. Stanley Prusiner, a professor at the University of California, has found out that malformed protein – called prions- can make the body consume itself. He concluded that

these prions can cause a rare type of degenerative brain disease. His brilliant experiment was the basis for researchers to study about FFI. Scientists have found out that prions attack the patient's thalamus, which is a brain structure that is responsible for sleep. Before this, scientists do not even know that thalamus is related to sleep. Sadly, there is no way to stop this grim disease or even lighten its merciless symptoms. Like most things in life, it is still a mystery.

In conclusion, the questions of sleep have intrigued scientists for a long time. The multitude of sleeping disorders out there that haunts the masses is worrying. No one can function well without a good night's sleep. That is why insomnia is a very terrible sleeping disorder to have. Causes of insomnia can range from petty little things like excessive worrying to malformed proteins that causes FFI. Insomniacs might even be the cause of the disorder themselves. Modern-style living has caused most people to neglect the circadian rhythm that evolution has bestowed upon them. Insomnias can be categorized into a few groups. For example, there is primary and secondary insomnia. Besides that, there are a few special types of insomnia out there. Psychophysiological insomniacs are people that worry too much about sleep to the point that they negatively affect their sleep. Bad as it seems, it is perfectly treatable. One could pop a sleeping pill, which would improve the activity of GABA. One could also try CBT, a form of psychotherapy that is better than sleeping pills. There are insomnias that tire you out, and then there are insomnias that can kill you. Fatal familial insomnia is a rare genetic disorder that affects only around 40 families world-wide. Firstly, one would

lose the ability to nap, and then the ability to sleep well through the night disappears. Slowly but surely, one would completely lose the ability to sleep, and eventually, his or her life. Malformed proteins called prions are the main culprit of this disease. They attack the thalamus, the brain structure responsible for sleep. No one knows how to stop it or why it happens. It is still a big mystery. So, when you feel like your eyes can't stay open and your brain feels really drowsy, just fall asleep and appreciate that you are not troubled by any sleeping disorders.

Men with chronic insomnia who also sleep less than six hours a night have a higher risk of early death than “normal” male sleepers who get more than six hours of shut-eye, a new study suggests. (Take National Geographic magazine's sleep quiz.)

Insomnia-difficulty falling or staying asleep-is the most common sleep disorder, affecting about 30 percent of people in the U. S., according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Chronic insomniacs are those who have had the disorder consistently for at least a year.

After decades of mixed findings, the new report shows that insomnia is a “serious disease with significant physical consequences, including mortality,” said study leader Alexandros N. Vgontzas, director of Penn State University's Sleep Research & Treatment Center in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Though the researchers didn't specifically study people who reported lack of sleep due to their lifestyle, Vgontzas emphasized that “losing sleep for whatever reason is bad for your health.” For instance, he has published



previous results showing that curtailing sleep in young adults by two hours a night for just one week is linked to inflammation that may cause cardiovascular problems.

A new study suggest that males suffering from chronic insomnia who sleeps less than six hours a night has a higher risk of early death than normal males that sleep more than six hours a day. After decades of research, study leader Alexandros N. Vgontzas, director of Penn State University's Sleep Research & Treatment Center in Hershey, Pennsylvania says that insomnia is a " serious disease with significant physical consequences, including mortality." These studies forever changes " how we view insomnia", said Vipin Garg, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Vgontzas study has shown that chronic male insomniacs are four times more likely to die early even after taking into account other factors such as smoking and sleep apnea. But it was not the case with the women. These findings may be alarming, but " there were a few weaknesses in the insomnia study's design," said Garg, of the Sleep Disorders Center. For example, the number of subjects in the study was small. No one dies directly from insomnia, instead the disease slowly corrode a person's health, exposing them to other diseases. Causes of insomnia and ways to treat it are still poorly understood. From now on, doctors have to change their attitude towards this sleeping disorder.