



## **THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP**

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### **Understanding Lack Of Sleep**

Insomnia is a very common occurrence and affects people of all ages for a variety of reasons. It should be taken as a serious disorder and the root causes determined to find an effective treatment, as if insomnia continues for a long period, it can have seriously detrimental effects on both physical and mental health.

### **Effects Of No Sleep**

Most of us can get by on a few hours sleep a night for a few nights here and there and the effects of this should be temporary and fairly minor, both for those who are suffering in the grip of long bouts of insomnia the long term effects can impact on others areas of life and may take some time to overcome. The common consequences of a lack of sleep include poor concentration and memory, lethargy, irritability, a decrease in co-ordination skills and low mood and sometimes depression though this may depend on the cause of the insomnia. If these symptoms are not addressed and treated it may be dangerous for the individual to use machinery, drive a car, care for dependents and generally carry on with their normal life. It is easy to see how this can have such a negative impact on work and personal life. In order to treat the symptoms and the insomnia it is important to determine the cause of the sleeplessness in the first instance.

### **Causes Of No Sleep**

The causes of insomnia are wide and varied and each person will have their own experience of their sleeping difficulties and the reasons behind them. For many of us this is the demands of small children and babies but most of us cope with this fairly well as we understand that our dependents need us, enjoy taking care of them and realise that this period of disturbed sleep will not continue indefinitely and should pass as the child ages.

For many others the cause of the insomnia is pain and discomfort,. This may be because of a personal injury that has been diagnosed, chronic back pain and back ache, disability or other problem that causes any degree of pain. It is vital that the source of the pain is diagnosed as pain exists as a way of telling us that something is wrong with our body and we shouldn't ignore it as it may be something serious and treatable. Occasionally back pain can be lessened by changing the mattress on the bed or indeed changing the position that you sleep in entirely. There are no hard and fast rules that suggest that people should sleep flat on their back in a bed, if it solves your pain try sleeping in a chair or in a more upright position. There are many new models of bed frame on the market that can actually be altered by remote control until a more comfortable position is found.

It is also common for insomnia to be caused by worry. This worry and stress may be work-related or personal and this type of issue can have a negative impact on mental health alone without the added detriment of any sleep. Counselling or debt management can often help individuals worry less about their personal circumstances, while your human resources department or occupational health personnel may be able to help you with any work-related problems. If you have any trouble sleeping that lasts for long periods of time, please see your GP who may be able to refer you to a specialist, help you determine the cause of your insomnia or even prescribe a medication that can help in the short term.

A lack of sleep can initially sound like a small problem, but after a long period of time with little or no sleep the consequences to other areas of life can be quite significant. It is important to find out why you are not sleeping and address the issues that arise.