Tossing and turning at night?

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MOST of us experience the occasional sleepless night but for some people getting a good night’s sleep is a rare exception.

A good night’s sleep is essential – it helps us feel refreshed, alert and even happy the next day.

Insomnia is a sleep disorder in which there is an inability to fall asleep or to stay asleep as long as you need; it’s also one of the symptoms of depression.

It affects people of all ages including children, although it’s more common in adults and its frequency increases with age. In general, women are affected more frequently than men.

Insomnia may be divided into three classes based on the duration of symptoms.

- Insomnia lasting one week or less may be termed transient insomnia.
- Short term insomnia lasts more than one week but resolves in less than three weeks.
- Long term or chronic insomnia lasts more than three weeks.

Insomnia can also be classified based on the underlying reasons for insomnia such as sleep hygiene, medical conditions, sleep disorders, stress factors and the like.

It is important to make a distinction between insomnia and other similar terminology, short duration sleep and sleep deprivation.

- Short duration sleep may be normal in some individuals who may require less time for sleep without feeling daytime impairment, the central symptom in the definition of insomnia.
- In insomnia, adequate time and opportunity for sleep is available, whereas in sleep deprivation, lack of sleep is due to lack of opportunity or time to sleep because of voluntary or intentional avoidance of sleep.

Dr Alison Bentley from the University of Witwatersrand’s Sleep Laboratory said people typically need seven to nine hours of good quality sleep.

But this varies from person to person and you know you’re getting enough sleep if you are able to cope with the demands of everyday life and don’t want to sleep as soon as lunchtime comes around.

It is very important that if you are not sleeping on a regular basis that you take it seriously and get help.

With insomnia linked to depression, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group engaged with Bentley to help shed light and give expert advice on how to deal with insomnia.