

Why Can't I Have a Good Night Sleep?

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Patricia who was 60-year-old, came to see me a few years ago with a main complaint of fatigue and insomnia. She had experienced the symptoms for over twenty years. Patricia used to be very busy taking care of her two children while managing a small business. In her memory, she never had any good nights of sleep in the past twenty years. After whole day of work, she couldn't fall asleep and had to take sleeping pills often. In the morning, it normally took her an hour to completely wake up with the help of two cups of coffee, and she felt tired again in the afternoon. In the past two years, her children left home for college and Patricia finally retired from her business. Even though she didn't have a packed schedule any more, her insomnia and fatigue had persisted. She felt asleep all right but always woke up in the mid of the night. Each night she woke up 2-3 times, sometimes with heart pounding, mind racing and sweats. It usually took her an hour to fall back to sleep again. She also complained mental fog, memory loss, sweet cravings, weight gain, irritability and mood swings.

Insomnia and fatigue are common health concerns for people with a busy modern lifestyle. Insomnia is the common reason that causes fatigue. The main complaints for insomnia include:

- Cannot fall asleep
- Disturbed sleep, easily wake up at night and with difficulty to fall back to sleep
- Feel not rested and still tired in the morning
- Slow starter in the morning
- Fatigue during the day

The common cause for insomnia is the malfunction of the **Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal system (HPA)**, aka adrenal system, stress responding system in the body. Long-term stress causes adrenal malfunction, which can be roughly classified into two stages, **stress stage** and **fatigue stage**. The characteristics of the **stress stage** include:

- Cannot fall asleep (adrenal hyper function)
- Afternoon fatigue or headache
- Slow sugar metabolism (insulin resistance)
- Low appetite control (hippocampus destruction)
- Low sex drive (suppress LH)
- Low thyroid function (suppress T3 conversion)

- Low liver detox function
- Slow bone growth (low calcium absorption), etc.

If the stress factors are not resolved in a period of time, the malfunction of adrenal system further develops into **fatigue stage**, in which patients experience tired easily, slow stress responding, low healing ability and other degeneration related symptoms. The characteristic of the **fatigue stage** include:

- Can not stay asleep (adrenal hypo function)
- Hypoglycemic reaction
- Get shaky, fatigue or lightheaded if meals are missed or delayed
- Irritable or moodiness before meals
- Eating relieves fatigue
- Crave sweets and/or salt

To identify detailed stages of adrenal problems, a saliva test for cortisol pattern is helpful. To identify the stage of the adrenal malfunction is the key to help insomnia because the treatment plan is going to be different for the two stages. The common complaints for insomnia and their associated adrenal stages are the follows:

- Cannot fall asleep (stress stage)
- Disturbed sleep, easily wake up at night and difficult to fall back to sleep (fatigue stage and hypoglycemic)
- Feel not rested and tired in the morning (both)
- Slow starter in the morning (stress stage)
- Afternoon fatigue and energy bouncing back at night (stress stage)

Patricia's insomnia in her early years belongs to the stress stage. The guidelines for treating this stage are:

- Calm adrenal down before bed time
 - ⇒ Avoid exciting activities such as TV, computer and games
 - ⇒ Relaxation such as hot bath, reading, yoga or meditation
 - ⇒ Supplements such as Chamomile tea, valerian root, 5-HTP and melatonin
- Avoid afternoon fatigue by rest and adding a

snack

- Avoid strong exercise, do mild one for a longer time
- Avoid coffee, caffeine drink, alcohol and tea
- Normally do not use animal adrenal glandular

Patricia's later years of insomnia belongs to the more severe stage of the adrenal malfunction, the fatigue stage. The adrenal system nearly or completely lost its ability to respond to stresses, including balancing blood sugar. Frequently hypoglycemic reactions during the day and night cause more adrenal stresses and leads to a vicious cycle. In addition to these for the stress stage, the guidelines for treating fatigue stage are:

- Stabilizing blood sugar by having small meals more frequently
- Introducing more breaks and relaxations during the day to save adrenal energy
- Adding snacks before bed to prevent hypoglycemic reaction at night
- Using animal glandular and herbal supplement to support adrenal system and balance blood sugar

However, to help adrenal recover completely, eliminating stress factors is always the first choice while supporting adrenal system with supplementation is secondary. Without solving the root issues, adrenal therapy will not work in a long-run. The common causes for adrenal stress are:

- Busy lifestyle: long working hours and not enough sleep
- Working at night or frequent travel across time zones
- Emotional stress
- Indigestion and food sensitivity
- Toxin accumulation
 - ⇒ low liver detox function
 - ⇒ Intestinal dysbiosis
- Female hormone imbalance
- Neurological conditions such as anxiety and depression
- Infections
- Pain

Addressing above factors efficiently helps adrenal recover completely and faster. Managing toxin factor sometimes is crucial to reduce adrenal stress.

According to ancient Chinese medicine, energy circulates the body through meridian system following a circadian cycle. The daily energy waves reach to the Liver and Gallbladder meridians, the main detox organs of the body, between 11pm and 3am. During this period of time, the body is under heavy detoxification process. If the body produces too much toxins or the liver detox function is compromised, stress occurs. This may disturb the adrenal system and cause the patient to wake up. Thus, addressing the toxin issue and supporting liver are important in the treatment of insomnia cases.

Hormone and neurotransmitter imbalances are common stressors to adrenal system. Women during premenstruation and menopause period are easily having insomnia. Our body's hormones are highly controlled with a negative feedback system. Excess amount of certain hormone signals hypothalamus, which in turn sends signal to lower the production of the hormone. However, excess hormone and neurotransmitter already produced in the system has to be detoxed by liver through ubiquitous pathways. Meanwhile, xeno-estrogens (estrogen-like toxins) and other environmental toxins also interfere with the hormone system and disturb the balance. Thus, balancing hormone and neurotransmitter by supporting liver and detoxing the body always help insomnia patients.

Patricia received individualized therapies including detailed dietary and lifestyle plan, intestinal cleansing, liver detoxification, female hormone balancing and adrenal support with a variety of natural modalities such as Chinese herbs, homeopathy, energy and functional medicine and nutritional supplementations. After a year of treatment, she was able to sleep through the night and had more energy during the day. She understands that lifestyle changes are necessary to assure a complete recovery of adrenal system. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, she is enjoying her retired life happily.

Dr. Harry Hong is a licensed acupuncture specialized in holistic healing for the Highly Sensitive. He teaches highly sensitive people to listen to their body and take charge of their own health. With his own systematic IBMT protocol that includes Chinese medicine, modern homeopathy, energetic testing and allergy desensitization, Dr. Hong helps Highly Sensitive people to gain back their immune strength and get their life back. He has offices in both South Florida and Chicago. Please visit his website at www.highlysensitivebody.com.