



Sleep Skills Group

Sleep Disorders Center

WHAT IS THE SLEEP SKILLS GROUP FOR INSOMNIA?

The Sleep Skills Group is a form of treatment designed to provide sleep knowledge and effective coping skills to help you sleep as soundly as possible. The group meets weekly for four weeks. The group is based on principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-i), which has been proven in scientific studies as a highly effective treatment for insomnia. For many people — even those with chronic or severe insomnia — CBT-I treatment is an effective alternative to sleeping pills.

Although no one can guarantee complete success in treating insomnia, CBT-I can benefit nearly everyone, including older adults who have been taking sleeping pills for years and people with comorbid problems like fibromyalgia and depression. The skills learned from CBT-I enable better-quality sleep for longer periods than if you simply stopped using medication.

In addition, CBT-I has no adverse side effects. As with learning any new skill, it may require an adjustment because it asks you to change how you think about and schedule your sleep.

WEEK-BY-WEEK PLAN

Cognitive behavioral therapy helps you change the thoughts (cognitions) and actions (behaviors) that interfere with your ability to get restful sleep. Following is a brief overview of the weekly CBT-I sessions. Patients are encouraged to attend the entire program in sequence. Practice makes perfect.

WEEK 1: SLEEP/LIFESTYLE HABITS

- Overview of the group structure and content
- Review of how insomnia develops into a chronic problem
- Discuss the rationale behind why this treatment works
- Creating a positive environment for sleep
- Simple lifestyle changes to improve sleep
- Self-monitoring: keeping a sleep diary
- Group activity: relaxed breathing

WEEK 2: SLEEP EDUCATION AND RELAXATION TRAINING

- Review sleep diaries and individualized sleep plans
- Effects of stress on your body and sleep
- Benefits of relaxation training
- Normal sleep
- How do other sleep problems impact insomnia?
- Sleep medication pros/cons
- Group activity: progressive muscle relaxation

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WEEK 3: COGNITIVE THERAPY 101

- Review sleep diaries and individualized sleep plans
- Learn how your thoughts about sleep can affect insomnia
- Begin to identify and challenge maladaptive thoughts about sleep
- Group activity: imagery relaxation

WEEK 4: REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND RELAPSE PREVENTION

- Review sleep diaries and individualized sleep plans
- Challenge negative beliefs about sleep by evaluating the evidence and developing coping thoughts to facilitate sleep
- Review of progress and development of future goals
- Relapse prevention and individualized follow-up plans
- Group activity: autogenic relaxation

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LEARNING TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Following is a brief guide to approaches that the Sleep Skills Group uses for treatment of insomnia. These therapies sound simple, but making them work well usually requires the coaching of a therapist and practice on the part of the patient.

Sleep hygiene refers to healthy sleep practices that foster and maintain sound sleep. They include creating a positive sleep environment and pursuing lifestyle habits such as scheduling physical exercise; moderating use of caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs that degrade sleep quality; and avoiding late-night eating.

Stimulus control therapy is a technique for retraining your “sleep brain” so it learns that wake-causing activities will not occur in bed. The average person will get some noticeable benefit just from this therapy, if it is done correctly. It focuses on maximizing the likelihood of sleep when you lie down in bed. The goal is to spend as close to 100 percent of bedtime as possible in actual sleep (rather than worrying, thinking or just lying awake). Stimulus control also eliminates from the bedroom stimulating activities such as television viewing and work. Patients are encouraged to leave the bedroom if they are not sleeping within 15 to 20 minutes.

Relaxation training is another well-documented intervention for insomnia. This therapy trains you to relax your body completely and reduce arousal, creating a more positive state for sleep.

Examples of relaxation training include progressive muscle relaxation and diaphragmatic breathing. You will get focused instruction and receive audio CDs for practice at home to develop this skill.

Cognitive therapy for sleep identifies and challenges thoughts that are out of tune with truths about sleep function. These thoughts can amplify worries about sleep, increasing body and mental tension, and sustain the inability to sleep. Thoughts such as, “I know this is going to be a bad night. I won’t feel rested tomorrow. Why can’t I sleep like everyone else?” are common and increase wake-sustaining tension, making it more difficult to go to sleep or sustain sleep. This therapy also instills facts about sleep to increase understanding of how the brain actually goes about sleeping.

Key goals in cognitive therapy for insomnia are to help reprogram the part of your brain that governs the sleep-wake cycle, to foster development of coping and problem-solving skills, and to change your thoughts about sleep. Changing the way you think takes knowledge and practice.

WHO OFFERS THE SLEEP SKILLS GROUP?

The group is offered by Cleveland Clinic Sleep Disorders Center post-doctoral psychology fellows and physicians who are trained in treating insomnia.

WHO SHOULD CONSIDER THE SLEEP SKILLS GROUP?

You should consider participating if you have insomnia and you:

- Worry about not sleeping, have racing thoughts and/or have difficulty relaxing at night
- Have a comorbid medical/psychiatric illness (e.g., generalized anxiety disorder, fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis, depression)
- Would like to consider nonmedicinal options to improve your sleep
- Are already on sleep medications and would like to taper off/discontinue due to side effects or concerns about tolerance/dependence

For more information on this program, please call Cleveland Clinic Sleep Disorders Center at **216.444.2165**.