Sleep Skills Group

What is the Sleep Skills Group for Insomnia?
The Sleep Skills Group is a service at the Sleep Disorders Center designed to provide insomnia patients with effective coping tools to improve their sleep. This service incorporates group cognitive behavioral therapy, shared medical visits, relaxation training, and lifestyle changes in a multidisciplinary approach offered in weekly sessions over five consecutive weeks.

Patients will gain skills in identifying triggers for insomnia including lifestyle habits, negative thoughts, and physiological tension. The group will focus on helping patients identify habits they can change as well as gaining confidence in their ability to think about their sleep difficulties in a constructive manner. Relaxation skills training, including a brief introduction to biofeedback is an integral part of the sessions.

Cognitive behavioral treatment has been shown to be an effective tool for coping with insomnia. The following is a brief overview of the program. Patients are encouraged to attend the entire program unless your provider feels you will benefit from attending select sessions or from starting after week one.

Where and who offers the Sleep Skills Group?
The Sleep Skills Group is offered at the Sleep Disorders Center by psychologists and physicians with training in treating insomnia.

Who should consider the Sleep Skills Group?
- Patients with insomnia associated with muscle tension, an inability to relax, and racing thoughts
- Patients with generalized anxiety disorder or depression that is accompanied by insomnia or other sleep disorders
- Patients who would like to consider non-medicinal options to improve their sleep
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Sleep hygiene: refers to good sleep practices that help create and maintain a positive state for sleep. This may include creating a positive sleep environment and developing healthy lifestyle habits such as exercise or reducing caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, or late night eating.

Sleep restriction: is a technique whereby a trained therapist helps the patient to maximize sleep efficiency i.e. to spend as close to 100% of the time in bed actually sleeping.

Relaxation training: is another well-documented intervention for insomnia. Relaxation training helps the patient learn to relax the body and reduce arousal, creating a more positive state for sleep. Examples of relaxation techniques include progressive muscle relaxation and biofeedback. Diaphragmatic breathing and imagery are also effective techniques. Patients will be instructed on how to perform these techniques and given audio CDs to practice at home.

Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBTi): includes identifying cognitive distortions related to sleep that increase the stress response for patients with insomnia. Thoughts such as, "I know this is going to be a bad night", “I won't feel rested tomorrow”, and “Why can't I sleep like everyone else?” are common and increase the stress response making it more difficult for the patient with insomnia to sleep. The therapist works to identify and challenge the patient’s cognitive distortions related to sleep. CBTi can help to increase one’s sense of control and develop problem-solving skills and coping thoughts that will reduce tension and increase sleep.

Shared Medical Visits: A sleep specialist will see you and discuss normal sleep, different stages of sleep, insomnia, pharmacological treatments for insomnia and their pros/cons. The sleep specialist will also talk about the importance of non-pharmacological treatments, complimentary and alternative treatments for insomnia. This is an opportunity to know all about the recent advances in the treatment of insomnia.
Week 1: Insomnia and Sleep Hygiene
• Creating a positive sleep environment
• Simple lifestyle changes to improve sleep
• Sleep restriction therapy
• Self-monitoring: keeping a sleep diary
• Group discussion: How has insomnia affected your life?
• Group activity: Deep breathing exercises

Week 2: Relaxation Training for Sleep
• The effects of stress on the body
• Benefits of relaxation training
• Introduction to biofeedback
• Group discussion: What do you do to manage stress?
• Group activity: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Week 3: Shared Medical Visit
• Normal sleep: sleep stages, sleep requirements
• How do other sleep problems impact insomnia?
• Sleep medications pros/cons
• All you ever wanted to know about sleep
• Review sleep diaries
• Group activity: relaxation strategies

Week 4: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy I
• Identifying maladaptive thoughts about sleep
• Learn how thoughts about sleep can affect insomnia
• Biofeedback
• Group Discussion: How do I feel about my sleep problem?
• Group Activity: Imagery Relaxation

Week 5: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy II
• Developing coping thoughts to facilitate sleep
• Review sleep diaries
• Biofeedback
• Group Discussion: Impact of depression and anxiety on sleep
• Group Activity: Eight Hours of Sleep relaxation