Falling Asleep with Anxiety

At the end of the day, many people have trouble turning off their mind. In fact, it seems all of the things they were too busy to think about during the day (i.e. relationships, money, work) hang over them and cause their mind to race when they should be going to sleep. When this begins to happen repeatedly, it can become a vicious cycle of anxiety and sleeplessness. Experts note there's significant overlap between symptoms of insomnia, anxiety and other mood disorders.

HOW ANXIETY AFFECTS YOUR SLEEP

Anyone can develop anxiety-related sleep problems which can make it difficult to fall asleep and cause frequent or early waking with an inability to fall back asleep. Sleep problems caused by anxiety aren't limited to people diagnosed with anxiety disorders though. Experts say people with persistent insomnia also become anxious about their sleep…and the more anxious they become, the greater the possibility of poor sleep and insomnia.

The good news is that if you have one problem, you can help the other at the same time. For example, if you have an anxiety disorder, then getting treatment with certain therapies, meditation techniques and/or medications can indirectly improve sleep.

IMPROVE SLEEP AND REDUCE ANXIETY ON YOUR OWN

Practice relaxation techniques – Many approaches, such as progressive relaxation, mindfulness exercises, meditation or yoga, can combat anxiety. Begin by trying these new skills earlier in the day so you don't put too much pressure on yourself before bedtime. Then, once you're comfortable with it, you can do it later in the day.

Get into a regular sleep routine – This would involve a routine to wind down before bed with a set bed time and waking time so as to allow the body's internal circadian clock work better.

Schedule some idle time before bed – Prior to beginning your bedtime routine, it may be helpful to jot down anything you need to remember for the next day. Address things like paying bills, work tasks or relationship issues at least couple hours before bedtime.

Cut down on screen time – It is tempting to watch tv, text or look on the computer up until time you try to go to sleep, but research has shown that the blue light in most electronic screens has the most potential to influence and delay the body's natural circadian rhythms, making it harder to fall asleep.

Limit alcohol and caffeine – People tend to think that drinking alcohol helps you fall asleep, but it can actually lead to lighter and more disrupted sleep. Caffeine also can stay in your system for several hours, so it's smart to avoid it later in the day if you're having trouble going to sleep.

Create a calming bedroom environment – Your bedroom environment should promote good sleep hygiene. Make it a cozy place that elicits calm; choose colors that make you feel calmer, try to make it a cool, dark, and quiet room equipped with some white noise if needed.

If you still have persistent sleep problems caused by anxiety, talk to your doctor or a behavioral health professional about treatment options.