

requires an overnight stay in a sleep lab. A variety of tests are done while you are asleep. These include measurements of your heart rate, breathing, blood oxygen levels, muscle activity, and eye movements. A recording of the electrical activity of the brain, known as an electroencephalogram, will also be performed during the polysomnogram. This test can help determine the cause and severity of the insomnia and help identify appropriate treatments.

A change in your sleep habits may be enough to help with your insomnia. Following are changes that may help:

1. Keep a regular sleep schedule, even on the weekends.
2. Reduce noise and light in the bedroom.
3. Keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature.
4. Exercise regularly, but at least 2 hours before bedtime.
5. Avoid beverages with caffeine in the evening.
6. Do not go to bed hungry.
7. Use your bed exclusively for sleep and sex.
8. Take a hot bath or shower for relaxation before bedtime.

If the insomnia persists on a chronic basis, other treatments may be necessary. Progressive muscle re-

laxation exercises and cognitive techniques may help. In progressive muscle relaxation, individual muscle groups are deliberately tightened and then relaxed as much as possible. The goal is to produce overall muscle relaxation that will promote sleep. Cognitive techniques are exercises to relax and change your thought patterns. Visualization of a relaxing environment, such as a beautiful sunset, is one technique. Another technique is called thought stopping. To use this technique, first focus on the negative thoughts or worries that are keeping you awake. Then order yourself to stop. This process can be repeated if the same thoughts come back. At times, treatment of underlying conditions, such as depression or pain, may need to be adjusted to help improve sleep. The long-term use of sleeping pills is controversial and should be done only with the close supervision of a physician.

For additional information, contact:

National Institute of Neurological Disorders
and Stroke

PO Box 5801
Bethesda, MD 20824
301-496-5751
www.ninds.nih.gov