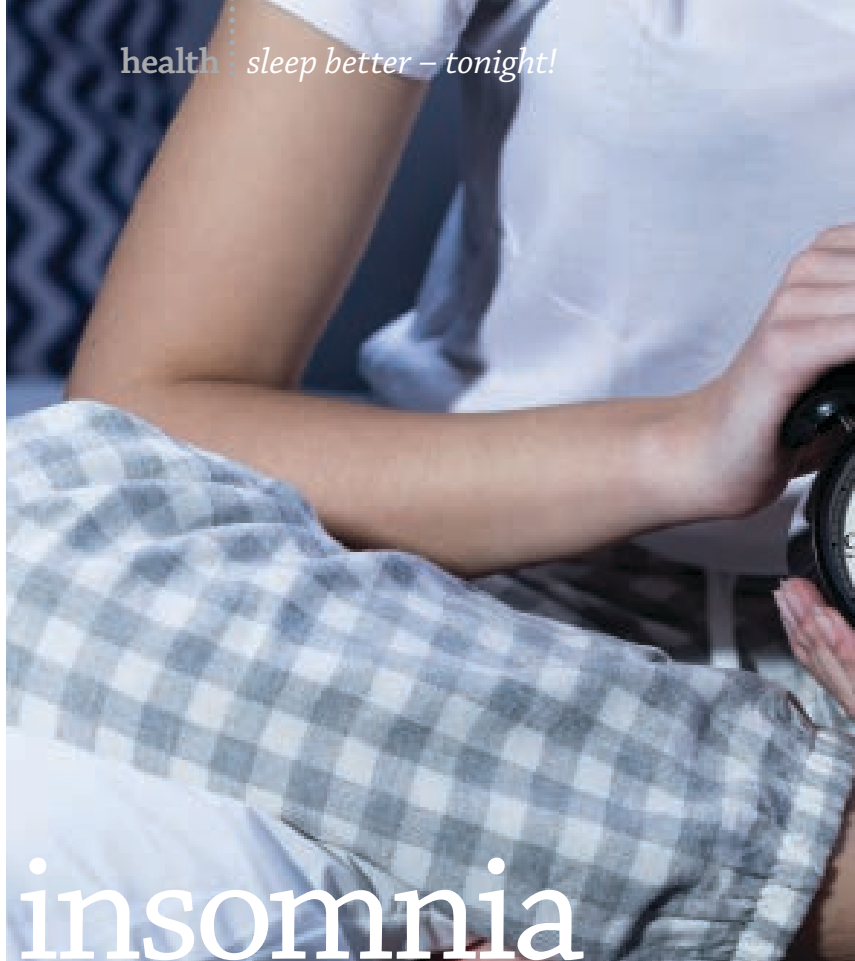


.....
*You've had your chamomile tea
– but you're still wide awake.
Naturopath Teresa Mitchell-
Paterson suggests five little
all-natural helpers.*
.....



Ease insomnia

YOU can be scrupulous about ‘sleep hygiene’, not eating or exercising late, and switching off all screens well before bedtime, but insomnia can still plague your nights. These are the best supplements that I recommend:

L-theanine

This amino acid is a component of green tea, and it significantly boosts the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) cycle of sleep. It is relaxing rather than sedating, which means that taking it throughout the day reduces the effects of stress and boosts mental alertness during your waking hours, but taking it before bed also gives a deeper sleep at night. It is particularly beneficial for people who are over-stimulated and can't shut down thoughts about work or life issues. It has also been shown to improve sleep quality in people with hyperactivity. In research reported in the *Alternative Medicine Review*, boys with ADHD were given L-theanine and questionnaires completed by their parents revealed the boys obtained significantly higher sleep percentage and sleep efficiency; moreover, they didn't fidget in their sleep: people with ADHD toss and turn a lot. Drinking green tea won't have the same effect - you need to take pure L-theanine in its active form. No known cautions or interactions exist, but check with your practitioner.

Lavender

We have absolutely no idea why this lovely herb

works, but work it does, as evidenced in a recent review which deemed lavender ingested or used topically to help getting people off to sleep and staying asleep. Lavender is excellent for children, and works well in patients with dementia and depression, as it increases the slow-wave sleep time, which means better and longer quality of sleep. It's a gentle, strengthening tonic for the nervous system so you need only a few drops of essential oil – perhaps 10 – in a bath or applied to the temples before bedtime. If you grow lavender, simply drink two cups of lavender tea throughout the day, and another before bed. Alternatively, a qualified herbalist can dispense lavender as a fluid extract or a tablet.

Phosphatidylserine

PS for short, this acts as an adaptogen for the brain and an adrenal supporter; it needs to be taken for a week or two before its effects manifest. PS's effectiveness comes from its ability to balance overactive cortisol levels. These levels should be high in the morning and decline gradually throughout the day so you can sleep. However, in night owls, cortisol levels are high at night and low in the morning, which means they wake up tired. Normally I recommend exercise as a remedy, but not everybody wants to get up and go for a run at 6 a.m. Taking PS before bed, and again if you



* Take two

Have a GP test your vitamin D, as blood levels below 60 are associated with disturbed circadian rhythms, which cause fatigue and sleep dysfunction. Magnesium, a mineral many of us are deficient in, depresses the sympathetic nervous system, so it makes sense to take a supplement at night. Choose an absorbable form such as a citrate, aspartate, glycinate, diglycinate, orotate, or succinate.

wake at night, is a good alternative. Don't take it with any stimulants like coffee, because it just won't work. PS is not recommended during pregnancy, or for people with kidney diseases. Nor is it advised for those with a sensitive gastric system or upper gastric inflammation.

Melatonin

The phytochemicals in tart Montmorency cherries (the juice and dried fruit are available online) raise melatonin because they're high in naturally occurring neurotransmitters: melatonin, serotonin and tryptophan precursors. The combination of these three actually lowers core body temperature: studies show the optimal core temperature for sleep is 15 to 20 degrees C. Temperatures above or below can cause restlessness. Tart cherries' anti-inflammatory effects also benefit people with arthritis, which may help them get to sleep. Melatonin is present in minute but highly bioactive quantities in several other foods - barley and rye; grape juice; olive oil, tomatoes, full-fat unprocessed milk; sweet cherries; strawberries and walnuts - so eating them in combination could promote sleep. Shift workers, and people who have difficulty getting off to sleep, can obtain sustained-release melatonin from a GP. Long-term melatonin supplementation does not negatively influence melatonin secretion from the pineal gland, so

Boys with ADHD who were given l-theanine slept for longer and deeper; plus, they stopped tossing and turning in their sleep.

don't be afraid to ask for it if you have serious sleep problems. Some people benefit from 6X homeopathic melatonin, six to 12 tablets.

Pick protein

For people who can get off to sleep but can't stay asleep, eating more protein throughout the day - about five to 10 percent above the recommended level to one gram per kilogram of body weight - reduces night wakefulness by regulating neurotransmitters in the brain. However, at night the protein must be eaten with vegetables or low-GI carbohydrates, because eating it alone blocks the orexin pathway, causing you to become you more alert. Iceberg lettuce is the ideal vegetable of choice as its lactucin (lactic acid), seen in the milky sap that seeps from cut leaves, exerts a sedative effect, and is very good for restlessness and insomnia. *Lactuca virosa* is also available in a homeopathic formulation, which makes it safe for children, but consult a homeopath. Adding BI (thiamine) produces a significant difference in sleep quality, so you get a deeper sleep. *

Naturopath Teresa Mitchell-Paterson (BHSc CompSci, MHSc HumNt, Adv Dip Nat) is a member of the Australian Traditional-Medicine Society.
www.atms.com.au