

## Sleep, Health and Insomnia

Insomnia is as common as common cold these days, perhaps even more so. It is related to many problems such as chronic fatigue, anxiety, depression, and many other serious diseases. Classical Chinese Medicine believe insomnia is related to disharmony of different organs in the body such as liver, kidney, heart, and stomach. To treat insomnia is to rebalance the organs. It takes a very different approach from that of the western medicine. Acupuncture and herbs are great for treating insomnia. However, acupuncture and herbs are not sleeping pills, they would may or may not work as quick as sleeping pills. Sometimes, it can improve in one treatment, sometimes it takes many more which depends on the cause, the degree of insomnia and also the individual's response to acupuncture or herbal treatment. The great benefit is that once you are adjusted well, you do not need to get acupuncture or herbs for a while, and there is no harmful side effects.

My late mentor Dr. Haisha Ni (倪海廈醫師) made significant contributions to Classical Chinese Medicine. He not only showed the world that Chinese Medicine can effectively treat many diseases, but also explained Classical Chinese Medicine in a "simple," "common sense" way that is easy to understand and made sense to patients. One concept he emphasized a lot is what is "normal". At present time, we depend on technology to decide on our fate such as blood tests, urine tests etc., but we could know whether something is going wrong much earlier than the tests can tell us. Thus, we can prevent serious disease happen or treat at a very early stage. That is what is called "the superior doctor treats diseases before it happens" (上功治未病). Knowing what is "normal" will also help the practitioner to predict the prognosis and to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment and alternate treatment strategies.

### What is "normal" sleep?

A normal sleep pattern is deep sound sleep (no disturbing dreams) in real local time from about 11:00pm to 5:00am without waking up in the middle (or wake up only a very short time, go back to sleep quickly) and feel energetic when awake without taking any sleeping pills. Anything besides that may indicate some kind of imbalances to a certain degree. Persistent symptoms such as difficult to fall to sleep (racing thoughts or restless legs etc.), waking up in the middle of night (do not go back to sleep right way), disturbing dreams while asleep, waking up too early in the morning, feeling very tired in the morning are different symptoms of insomnia.

### What can you do to improve sleep?

- Do not go to bed later than 11:00pm real local time for a prolonged period. From 11:00pm to 3:00am, according to Chinese medicine, is the time when the liver to detox and regenerate. The body should stop all other activities, and allow the liver to work on the very important job.
- If you have trouble fall to sleep, try not to watch TV ( such as horror movies etc), exercise in the evening just before bed.
- Do not use wine as lullaby, it works for a short time period. For a long term, it loses its magic.
- If you have vivid dreams, or waking up early in the morning, try not to eat late or over eat in the night.
- If you wake up at certain time constantly for no obvious reason, it could be an indication of certain organ has more serious issue. Seek treatment as early as you can.

Both acupuncture and herbs can help solve the problem. Wish everybody sweet dreams every night.