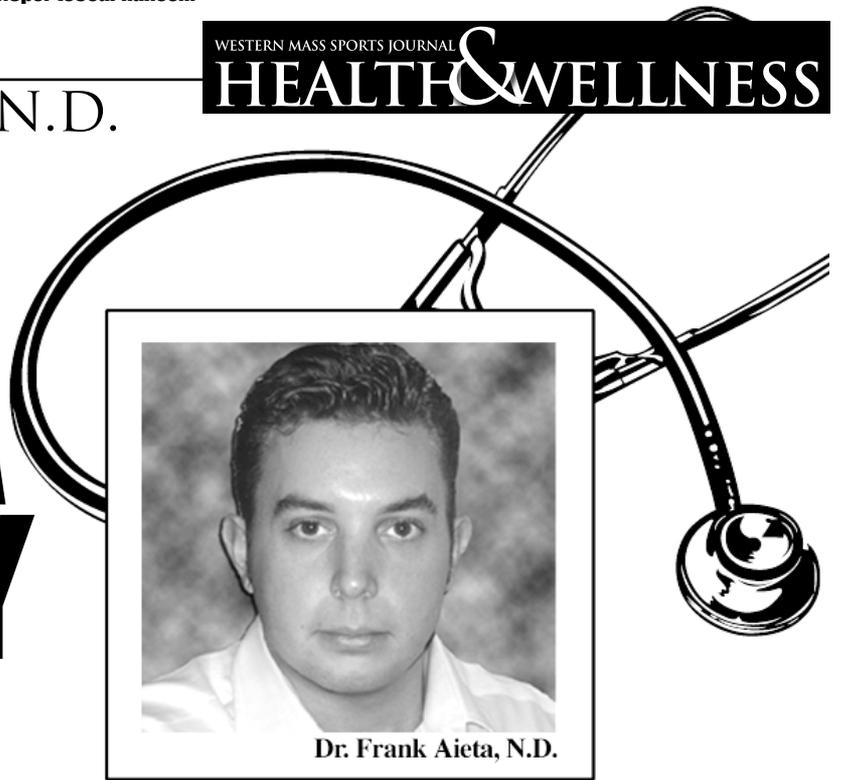


TREATING INSOMNIA NATURALLY



Dr. Frank Aieta, N.D.

Believe it or not, up to 30 percent of the population suffers from insomnia within the course of a year. Many of the patients that I see with insomnia are taking over-the-counter medications to combat this problem, while others are using stronger sedatives.

My main goal with these patients is to get them off of these potentially addictive treatments and address the underlying cause of the problem. There are two different types of insomnia, and which kind a patient has needs to be identified before treatment begins. The first kind is called sleep-onset insomnia, in which individuals have a hard time falling asleep. The second is called sleep-maintenance insomnia, which is when individuals experience frequent or early waking.

The first thing I do with all of my patients, regardless of the type of insomnia they have, is to look at dietary and lifestyle factors. A good way to start is by eliminating sleep inhibitors. Caffeine-containing products are eliminated first; this includes not only the obvious coffee, but also soda, chocolate and tea. Some people are more sensitive to caffeine than others because they eliminate it from their bodies at a slower rate.

Another substance that can impair sleep is alcohol. Why? Because alcohol can disrupt the brain's levels of serotonin, which is an important sleep initiator. Alcohol also causes a release of adrenaline, which can cause sudden waking in the middle of the night. Blood sugar imbalances can also lead to insomnia, especially sleep-maintenance insomnia. If a patient's blood

sugar drops in the middle of the night, this can cause a release of hormones that help regulate blood sugar levels, such as adrenaline and cortisol. To prevent this from happening, I have all of my patients eat something with protein in it prior to sleep to maintain steady blood sugar throughout the night. Also, I have them avoid sugary snacks after their last meal of the day.

Exercise has been shown to

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improve sleep quality, but I tell patients to refrain from it prior to bedtime because it can be too stimulating for some. Morning or afternoon is the optimal time to exercise, which should be of moderate intensity. For patients who have a hard time shutting their minds down before bed or who have sleep-onset insomnia, I encourage them to buy a relaxation CD and listen to it before bed.

Many times just following these diet and lifestyle recommendations is all that is needed to relieve insomnia. When additional support is required, I recommend using natural sedatives that work well without the side effects associated with the prescription or over-the-counter sedatives.

One of the best natural sedatives that I have found to work

is called melatonin, which is our body's sleep hormone. If a patient's levels are low, then that patient can suffer from both types of insomnia. The beauty of using melatonin is that it is non-addicting and will only produce a sedative effect when melatonin levels are low. Usually older patients need a higher dose than younger patients.

Finally, I may recommend herbs that have sedative properties if the melatonin doesn't work. Some commonly-used herbs are passion flower, valerian, chamomile and Jamaican dogwood. The dosage of each is individualized on a patient-to-patient basis.

So, if you are one of many Americans suffering from sleep problems on a nightly basis, try some of the lifestyle changes first. But if they don't help, make an appointment with a naturopathic physician for some advice on a natural

sedative that may work for you.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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