

New Study Links Insomnia and Type 2 Diabetes

Almost everyone suffers from bouts of insomnia from time to time. In fact, [nearly 60 million Americans a year](#) experience insomnia and wake up feeling unrefreshed. The common sleep disorder can make it hard to fall asleep, hard to stay asleep, or cause someone to wake up too early and not be able to get back to sleep.

“It needs to have some daytime consequence to be considered insomnia,” explained Dr. Sarah Zallek, medical director, OSF Sleep. “You can’t just have a little trouble sleeping and feel great in the day and we would call it insomnia; we would say that’s a little trouble falling asleep. Insomnia is really trouble sleeping that is associated with daytime dysfunction, like tiredness or inattention or mood problems and so on.”

For most people, insomnia goes away after lifestyle factors like family or work stresses resolve. However, for those who suffer from ongoing untreated insomnia, the [National Institutes of Health](#) warns it can increase the risk for a myriad of health issues, including stroke, seizures, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Now a new large-scale study found – type 2 diabetes can be added to that list. The [study](#), published in the journal *Diabetologia*, indicates that long-term insomnia raises the risk for type 2 diabetes by 17%.

“What they found that was new is that insomnia is a causal risk factor for diabetes. So it’s not just associated, and you have to wonder, is it insomnia that has an effect on diabetes, or is it just an association? It’s actually one of the now known causes of things that can lead to diabetes,” says Dr. Zallek.

Researchers studied the DNA of nearly 900,000 people to determine insomnia can be considered an independent risk factor for the disease. According to Dr. Zallek, the good news is that insomnia is a treatable condition.

“A lot of insomnia is because of sleep habits, or what we call sleep hygiene, and we start with that,” she says. “Maximizing good sleep habits treats most people’s difficulty sleeping. And those sleep habits are best thought of as kind of a way to tell your brain that it’s good to be asleep in bed and awake everywhere else.”

Dr. Zallek says there are easy steps you can take to curb insomnia without medication. These include:

- **Maintaining the purpose of your bed:** Use your bed only for sleeping and intimacy. When you get in bed, your brain should know it’s time to go to sleep.
- **Following a sleep schedule:** Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- **Staying active:** Activity is an important sleep hygiene step. However, to avoid restlessness, you should schedule this active time a few hours before you plan on going to bed.
- **Scheduling meals:** Avoid late dinners and late-night snacks, and limit caffeine.

Those with persistent trouble sleeping or sleeplessness should see a [provider who specializes in sleep medicine](#).

Most people with insomnia do not need [medication](#) or a sleep test. A sleep specialist can usually help reduce the issues that might be leading to insomnia, or work around them with sleep-promoting strategies.