



## A review on ayurvedic approaches for the management of insomnia (Anidra)

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### Abstract

Ayurveda believes that life is based on the balance between the three important pillars - sleep, food and sexual energy. Sleep is thus an essential component for a healthy life and the balance between the three pillars is very essential. Insomnia is typically the disorder of sleep resulting from the imbalance between the three doshas or life energy- Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Insomnia is the inability in initiation or maintenance of sleep peacefully for a minimum period of time. Acute insomnia is transient in nature and often goes back to normal conditions without any treatment whereas Secondary insomnia is chronic and requires treatment. Secondary insomnia is a side effect of some other underlying condition such as neurological illness, emotional or some other disorder. Causes of insomnia are irregular sleeping patterns, use of cellphones/ TV at night, caffeinated drink consumption at night, etc. Symptoms often are identified as lethargy, fatigue, irritability, drowsiness, etc. Treatment is typically done via panchakarma process, pacifying herbal drinks, dietary modifications, brain tonics and others. So it's eminent to understand the real meaning of sleep and to practice and employ healthy sleep in our lifestyle to rejuvenate our mind and body.

**Keywords:** Anidra, ayurveda, doshas, insomina, sleeping patterns, panchakarma

### Introduction

Facing difficulties in falling asleep, maintaining an uninterrupted sleep or facing irregular sleep patterns, all these situations are very prevalent these days. These are the symptoms of a worldwide common sleep disorder phenomenon known as insomnia/ nidranash. According to national health survey approximately 28% of the urban population of India is facing insomnia. Insomnia is in fact, both a symptom as well as a disorder. Sleep is a natural way of refreshing and calming the mind and body. Alterations in the quality, quantity as well as patterns of sleep contribute to various disorders. If not treated timely, it may increase the risk of diseases like diabetes, depression, restlessness, anger issues and hypertension. Severe insomnia is sleeping less than 3.5 hours in females and 4.5 hours in males. Insomnia can be acute (short term) or chronic (long term). Acute Insomnia is common and brought about by situations such as family pressure, stress, and trauma. On the other hand, chronic Insomnia lasts longer and in most cases are secondary, meaning they are either symptoms or side effects of some other problem<sup>[1]</sup>.

Primary insomnia is its own distinct disorder. Factors such as long lasting stress or emotional upset, work schedules that disturb sleep routine trigger primary insomnia. Secondary insomnia is a side effect of another problem such as emotional, neurological or other medical and sleep disorder<sup>[1]</sup>.

### Causes of Insomnia

Irregular sleeping patterns, late night shifts, use of caffeinated drinks before bedtime, use of TV and cell phones during night, long gap between meals, withheld emotions like anger, anxiety, stress disorder, neurological disorders like Alzheimer's or Parkinson's, asthma, smoking, nocturia, restless leg syndrome<sup>[2]</sup>.

### Symptoms of Insomnia

- Lethargy
- Fatigue
- Indigestion
- Drowsiness
- Yawning
- Heaviness of head

### Complications

- Low performance
- Diminished focusing abilities
- Increased risks of high blood pressure
- Constant irritation
- Mental instability
- Slowed reaction time and increased chances of accident.

### Ayurvedic Approach

Ayurveda recognizes the importance of sleep to health. In fact, it maintains that sleep and diet are the two pillars of health. Insomnia, or Anidra, is not just about being tired, it means that the nervous system has been weakened and reduces our ability to cope. Insomnia is called Anidra / Nidranasha, an imbalance in Tarpaka Kapha, Sadhaka Pitta and PranaVayu, but the ultimate goal of an Ayurvedic approach to Anidra is to fabricate the Ojas (a factor produced from the most subtle level of proper digestion, and it brings energy, clarity of thinking, strong immunity, happiness, and contentment). It has been proven from research that, only the deepest and most restful sleep, which is called the Stage Four sleep, fabricates Ojas. The level of sleep required to maintain a good state of health, solely depends on the person's mind-body constitution or Prakruti. Ayurveda pinpoints three different sleeping disorders which

are; Vata Imbalance, Pitta Imbalance, and Kapha Imbalance [1].

### Causes of Insomnia (Anidra)

#### Tarpak Kapha

It is an auxiliary-dosha of Kapha and its job is to nourish the cells of the brain, resulting in a restful night's sleep. When this dosha is not in balance the brain cells go unnourished, causing insomnia. Still not feeling refreshed, sluggish and tired even after a good uncurbed sleep, the associated dish is kapha and such imbalance requires 8-9 hours of sleep [2].

#### Prana Vayu

It is an auxiliary-dosha of Vata it creates a sensitive nervous system, and this, together with an aggravated PranaVayu, causes insomnia. It's also linked to depression, anxiety and worrying. A difficulty in initiation of sleep is indicative of vatta imbalance. This imbalance is associated with hyperactivity, hypersensitivity, anxiety, worry. People with such imbalance requires 6-7 hours of sleep [3].

#### Sadhak Pitta

It is an auxiliary-dosha of Pitta and it can be found in the heart. It is in control of our emotions, spirituality, decisiveness and desires. Any imbalance creates problems for the sufferer, such as working too hard and too long, and becoming very demanding. This ultimately leads to insomnia. People with fragmented sleep patterns and frequent awakening at night are associated with pitta imbalance. This imbalance is correlated with anger, stress, and emotional sadness. Such people require 7-8 hours of sleep [4].

#### Management of Insomnia [5]

Based on the severity of the presentation, Insomnia are approached to be managed at the outpatient level (in mild to moderate cases) and as inpatient (for the severely affected).

#### Purification of the System by Panchakarma or Sodhana Procedures.

All chronic diseases require purification, and panchakarma procedures are an effective way to achieve detoxification. Keeping vatta and pitta vitiation in mind, oleation with medicated ghee or oil prior to purification procedures are advised.

Purification procedures like virechana (medicated purgation), vamana (medicated vomiting), vasthi (medicated enema) and nasya (nasal administration of medicines) are indicated here. After doing these purification procedures, shirodhara or pouring of selected medicated oils or buttermilk over scalp is completed. These procedures help in regulating the brain's metabolism and thus regulate the sleep rhythm [6].

#### Pacifying medicines for insomnia

Calming herbal supplements and teas: liquorice, chamomile, cardamom and hibiscus based teas are excellent calming agents [3].

Medicated ghee, milk, ashvagandha [5], yashtimadhu, brahmi, mandookparni, sarpgandha, jatamansi churns, tagara churna [7].

**Table 1:** List of medicines/drugs used for Insomnia

Name of Drug	Biological Source
Ashvagandha	<i>Withania somnifera</i>
Somlata	<i>Sareostemma acidum</i>
Yashtimadhu	<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>
Brahmi	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i>
Mandookparni	<i>Cantella asiatica</i>
Sarpgandha	<i>Rauwolfia serpentina</i>
Jatamansi	<i>Nordostachys jatamansi</i>
Tagara	<i>Valerina wallichii</i>

#### Long Term Therapy

##### Sleep hygiene

It is best to avoid all stimulating drinks black coffee and black tea in the evening to help with sleep. It is also advised to avoid stimulating television programs and mobile screen especially an hour before bedtime. Ayurveda considers 8pm-11pm as an ideal time to go to bed and 5am-8am as the best time to wake up and feel refreshed. Sleeping too late and waking up later does not have a good effect on the body due to various hormonal functions that follows the sun's rhythm [3].

##### The Sleep Ritual

The sleep ritual includes activities, diet and/or herbs that will lead to a well-deserved, deep, and nourishing night's sleep. When done properly, these rituals ensure a harmonious body balance, and a productive day ahead [3].

- Plan your dinner ahead. Dinner is a double-edged sword. Too light may make one feel unsatisfied/hungry and disturb sleep. Too heavy may destroy the quality of sleep and make one feel tired in the morning.
- Major quantity of day's hydration must be before 6 pm. Don't try to compensate for day's low water intake just before bed.
- A hot shower or a bath is recommended once the meal is prepared before eating. Applying coconut or sesame oil over hands and soles of the feet is recommended for the aching muscles.
- Eat in a peaceful and un-distracted environment. We need all our attention attached to the food consumed to appreciate the hard work behind it and feel content with all our five sense organs. Watching television and handling mobile while eating should be avoided.
- Calming and digestive herbal teas can be consumed after dinner.
- Light walking, stretching or reading can be done after the meal time. Make sure you also spend some time with yourself observing breathing and appreciating the day just before bedtime. It can also transform into a meditative experience or prayer, which helps to let go of negative feelings and emotions.

##### Behavioral therapies

Behavioral therapy such as stimulus control, relaxation, sleep restriction therapy, cognitive and behavioral therapies are beneficial as per reported trials [2].

##### Dietary items for the management of nidranash (primary insomnia)

There are many dietary items included in Ayurveda classics (Table 2), which are helpful in inducing sound sleep, including this items in food and following healthy dietary guidelines will help a person to get healthy natural sleep [4].

**Table 2:** Showing the dietary items for the management of primary Insomnia

Dietary Items	Charaka Samhita [8]	Susruta Samhita [9]	Asthanga Hridaya [10]	Asthanga Sangraha [11]	Bhava Prakasha [12]	Kaiadev Nighantu [13]	Dhanwantari Nighantu [14]	Madanpala Nighantu [15]	Raja Nighantu [16]
Anupa Mamsa (meat of animals inhabiting marshy land)	+		+			+			
Audaka Mamsa (meat of aquatic animal)	+		+			+			
Bileshaya Mamsa Rasa (meat of animals living in burrows)		+		+					
Dadhi (curd)									
Dharoshna Dugdha (warm freshly collected milk)									+
Draksha (grapes)		+							
Guda (jaggery)						+			
Ikshu Drvaynam (sugarcane preparation)		+	+						
Kilata (inspissated milk)	+		+		+	+	+	+	
Kshira (milk)		+	+	+					
Laja odana (cooked puffed rice)						+			
Madya (alcohol)	+		+	+	+		+	+	
Mahish Kshira (buffalo's milk)	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	
Mahish Mamsa (bufflo's meat)	+		+	+	+		+	+	
Mahisha Dahi (curd of buffalo's milk)			+			+			
Mamsa Rasa (meat soup)			+	+					
Masha (black gram)			+						
Morata (Milk of a cow seven days after calving)	+								
Pisthanna (flour preparation)		+	+			+			
Piyush (colostrum)	+				+			+	
Potaki ( <i>Basella alba</i> Linn.)					+			+	
Raja Palandu (variety of onion)									+
Shali Anna with Dadhi (rice with curd)	+								
Shali Dhanya (paddy)		+	+			+			
Snehanvit Takra (butter milk with cream)									+
Sukar Mamsa (pork)						+	+	+	
Upodaka/Upodaki ( <i>Basella rubra</i> Linn.)						+			+
Vartaki ( <i>Solanum indicum</i> Linn.)									+
Vishkira Mamsa Rasa (meat of gallinacious birds)		+							

### Yoga and meditation for stress management

Meditation is a well-known method of calming the mind and body and releasing the buildup stress out of the body. Yogic exercises like suryanamaskar and pranayama help in relaxing of muscles and aids sleep specially in geriatric population [17].

### Introduction of Brain tonics into diet

Brain tonics like saraswataristh and ashwagandharisth are helpful in relaxing the mind and helpful in sleep.

### Aromatherapy

Essential oils like lavender oil are clinically proven to be effective in treating insomnia especially in women [18].

### Conclusion

Insomnia has become a very crucial problem and is affecting people from nearly all age groups. Managing insomnia with modern pharmacological drugs like benzodiazepines antidepressants melatonin receptor agonist etc has long-term adverse effects. So, Ayurvedic system can

prove to be a better and safe alternative in the short term and long term treatment of the root cause of insomnia.

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