

PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

Insomnia: How OMT Can Help

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WHAT IS INSOMNIA?

Insomnia is a common sleep-wake disorder in which a person cannot obtain quality sleep, despite more than enough time or opportunity. People with insomnia typically describe difficulty falling or staying asleep, as well as difficulty performing daytime functions. They may also struggle with physical symptoms, such as tense muscles or headaches. People with insomnia are more likely to have mood disorders, stress, high blood pressure and other medical conditions.

HOW DOES THE BODY REGULATE SLEEP?

The nervous system plays an important role in regulating sleep. A specialized part of the nervous system—the autonomic nervous system—is responsible for both the “fight or flight” response, also known as the stress response, and the “rest and digest” response. The autonomic nervous system must work in a balanced manner for normal body function and specifically for normal sleep/wake cycles.

HOW CAN OMT HELP?

People with insomnia often have an unbalanced autonomic nervous system, which means they spend more time in the “fight or flight” mode, making it difficult to sleep. Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) is capable of identifying and correcting imbalances in this system.

The nerves in this system are located in and around the spine, protected by bones, muscles and other tissues. Other areas of the body that contribute to this system are the sacrum (the bottom of the spine, including the tailbone), the skull and the ribs. OMT can identify problems in these areas by assessing position, pain and restricted movement. By correcting these problems, OMT can influence the autonomic nervous system. This can help create a normal sleep/wake cycle and improve sleep for people with insomnia.

OMT can be immediately effective but may take multiple treatment sessions and may be one part of a comprehensive treatment plan from your physician. You can talk with your osteopathic family physician about the possible benefits, risks and side effects of these treatments.

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