

A GUIDE TO SLEEPING BETTER

# Understanding Insomnia from TCM



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## INTRODUCTION

# Time to Sleep Better

Hi everyone, I'm Li Duggan of Li Duggan Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine. I run clinics in Ireland and I get a lot of clients who consult me about insomnia.

Do you suffer from insomnia and restless nights too? Not having a good sleep eventually leads to low energy, irritability, and not being your best self the following day.



If sleeplessness happens to you once in a blue moon, it may not be too bad... But if it happens often, do not consider it lightly. You should try to manage insomnia before it disrupts your life.

This handy guide is here to equip you with the knowledge and tools to fight back and reclaim control of your sleep and overall well-being.

## CHAPTER I

# What is Insomnia in the Lens of TCM?



## What is Insomnia?

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), insomnia is seen as a symptom of underlying imbalances rather than a condition itself.

Difficulty falling asleep, frequent waking, restless sleep, or waking up too early all point to disharmonies in the body's Qi, Blood, Yin, or Yang.

TCM seeks to address the root cause of sleep disturbances to restore restful sleep and overall well-being.

## CHAPTER II

# Common Causes of Insomnia in TCM

You may already have some suspicions about why you cannot sleep properly. It could be stress, your eating habits, or your lifestyle. In the view of Traditional Chinese Medicine, insomnia can be caused by imbalances of qi or the life force in certain body parts, namely:

## Heart and Shen (Spirit) Imbalance

The Heart houses the Shen, or spirit. If the Heart is weak or unsettled, sleep disturbances like frequent waking, vivid dreams, and anxiety can arise.

## Liver Qi Stagnation and Heat

Stress, frustration, or unresolved emotions can cause Liver Qi to stagnate and generate heat, leading to difficulty falling asleep and restless sleep.



## Blood Deficiency

Insufficient Blood fails to nourish the Shen, resulting in light sleep, frequent waking, and difficulty falling back asleep.



## Kidney Yin Deficiency

A deficiency in Kidney Yin leads to heat rising in the body, causing night sweats, restlessness, and difficulty staying asleep.



## Spleen and Stomach Disharmony

Poor digestion, eating too late, or excessive worry can disturb the flow of Qi and create difficulty falling asleep.





## CHAPTER III

# Symptoms of Insomnia Based on TCM Patterns



It is easy to identify the symptoms of insomnia. And here are the explanation based on Traditional Chinese Medicine, when we look at the individual symptoms.

## Difficulty Falling Asleep

In TCM, this is often due to Liver Qi stagnation or Heart Blood deficiency.



## Frequent Waking with Anxiety

This indicates Heart and Shen disharmony, often linked to Blood or Yin deficiency.

## Waking Up Too Early and Unable to Go Back to Sleep

Commonly due to Qi or Blood deficiency, which fails to anchor the Shen.

## Restless Sleep with Night Sweats

Waking up sweaty suggests Kidney Yin deficiency causing internal heat.

## Vivid or Disturbing Dreams

Often linked to Liver Qi stagnation or Heart heat disturbing the Shen.



In Traditional Chinese Medicine, Yin and Yang represent the body's dynamic balance—**Yin** is cool, nourishing, and passive, while **Yang** is warm, active, and energizing. Health depends on their harmony; an imbalance can lead to illness or discomfort.





## CHAPTER IV

# Dietary and Lifestyle Adjustments for Better Sleep

One of the most important things to realise about insomnia is that your diet and lifestyle is directly affecting your sleep.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, according to Traditional Chinese Medicine, certain body parts become imbalanced, contributing to sleeplessness and restlessness.

In this chapter, we will mention food you can eat to restore balance to the relevant body parts. As always, make sure to consult your doctor before consuming any of these foods, fruits, and herbs, and make sure that you are not allergic to any of these too.





## Heart and Shen Imbalance

Eat calming foods like lotus seeds, jujube dates, and goji berries. Avoid caffeine and stimulating foods.

## Liver Qi Stagnation and Heat

Incorporate cooling foods like leafy greens, peppermint tea, and chrysanthemum tea. Practice stress management techniques.

## Blood Deficiency

Consume nutrient-dense foods like black sesame seeds, dark leafy greens, and bone broth.

## Kidney Yin Deficiency

Include hydrating and cooling foods like pears, almonds, and seaweed. Avoid excessive spicy or fried foods.

## Spleen and Stomach Disharmony

Avoid late-night eating, heavy meals, and greasy foods. Stick to warm, cooked foods for better digestion.

## CHAPTER V

# Acupressure for Insomnia Relief

Acupressure is a healing technique in TCM that involves applying gentle pressure to specific points on the body to restore balance, relieve pain, and improve overall well-being. It works by stimulating the body's natural energy flow (Qi) to promote relaxation and healing.

To stimulate acupressure points:

- **Press or massage** the point using your thumb or index finger with firm but comfortable pressure.
- **Hold or rub** in a circular motion for 30 seconds to 2 minutes on each point.
- Repeat **1–3 times daily** for best results.
- Apply pressure on **both sides of the body** if applicable for balance.



Here are the acupressure points and how to find them. Look at where the red dots are located. These are the points you need to stimulate.

**Heart 7**  
**Shenmen 神门**



**Spleen 6**  
**Sanyinjiao 三阴交**



**Liver 3**  
**Taichong 太冲**



**Kidney 6**  
**Zhaohai 照海**





## CHAPTER VI

# Herbal Remedies for Insomnia



Herbal medicine can be an effective way to address sleep disturbances:

- **Suan Zao Ren (Zizyphus Seed):** Nourishes the Heart and calms the Shen.
- **Bai Zi Ren (Biota Seed):** Moistens the Heart and helps with night-time restlessness.
- **Long Yan Rou (Longan Fruit):** Tonifies Blood and soothes the Shen.
- **Huang Lian (Coptis Root):** Clears heat disturbing the Heart.
- **Goji Berries and Chrysanthemum:** For dry, itchy, and puffy Eyes after sleepless nights.

## CHAPTER VII

# Final Tips for Restorative Sleep



By addressing the root causes of insomnia using TCM principles, you can achieve deeper, more restorative sleep and overall balance in your body.

- Maintain a **regular sleep schedule** and go to bed before 11 PM.
- **Avoid excessive screen time** and stimulating activities before bed.
- Practice **deep breathing or meditation** to calm the Shen.
- **Engage in gentle exercises** like Tai Chi or walking to move Qi and reduce stress.



## CHAPTER VIII

# Activity To Help You Sleep Better



Do you know what a sleep tracker is? A sleep tracker helps one take note of their sleeping habits to find out patterns and perhaps even the causes of why one may have insomnia.

Use the space provided in the next pages to take note of what time you slept, what you ate before you slept, the activities you did before you slept, and how many hours you managed to sleep.

Try to do it for a week or two. By tracking your activities and your sleep schedule, it will help you find points of improvement:

**Date****Take note of: Hours of sleep, time  
sleep, activities before bed, and  
food eaten before sleep**

**Date****Take note of: Hours of sleep, time  
sleep, activities before bed, and  
food eaten before sleep**

## CONCLUSION

# What's next?

We hope this guide has been helpful to you. From incorporating a holistic approach with diet and even exploring how Traditional Chinese Medicine can be incorporated into your lifestyle, these tips will surely be a step towards improving your sleep.

Remember, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Find what works for you and consult a healthcare professional for personalised guidance.

If you're in Ireland and interested in exploring acupuncture and other Traditional Chinese Medicine techniques as part of your insomnia management plan, consider contacting us at Li Duggan Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine. If you're not in Ireland, we also offer video consultations.

Our team of experienced practitioners can provide a personalised consultation to discuss your specific needs.



# Thank you and see you soon!

## **Foxrock Clinic**

Opening Hours

Wednesday: 10am–Flexible

Friday–Saturday: 10am–Flexible

Address

Grange House,  
94 Foxrock Avenue,  
Co.Dublin,  
D18N220



## **Delgany Clinic**

Opening Hours

Tuesday: 10:30am–Flexible

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