

# Insomnia Medicine in Ancient Chinese Books



## Introduction

In traditional Chinese medicine, insomnia is also called an illness of “no sleep” or “on-and-off sleep.” It is caused by external impact or internal injury that leads to maladjustment of the functions of organs. The symptoms include habitual difficulty in getting sleep, failure to sleep peacefully, or sleep off and on. Sometimes, there is no sleep the whole night or perplexity of dreams. The term refers to the failure to get normal sleep (including sleeplessness and short-interval sleep). It is also accompanied with dizziness forgetfulness. The illness usually comes in three stages: inceptive loss of sleep, intermittent loss of sleep, and terminal loss of sleep. The illness is comparable to neurological sleeplessness in modern medicine. If the sleep has been insufficient for 3-4 weeks with obvious functional disruption, then it can be considered insomnia, regardless how many hours of sleep a night.

The basic definition of sleeplessness is sleep disruption. The illness is common but difficult to cure. With the quickening of tempo in life and the increase of the pressure from competitiveness, the number of sleepless people tends to rise, causing concern. Inadequate sleep may cause physical and mental injuries, including the weakening of thinking power of the brain, bluntness of alert and judgment, maladjustment of the functions of immunity, and imbalance of endocrine.

In Chinese medical archives, the term “sleeplessness” first appeared in nei jing. It uses such expressions as “eye failure to close,” “being unable to sleep,” “being unable to lie in bed,” “little sleep,” “obsession with sleep,” “liking to sleep,” “sleep of eyes,” “over-lying in bed,” and “liking to lie in bed.” In nan jing, it is called “no sleep.” The shang han za bing lun refers

to the illness as “willingness to sleep,” “multiple sleep,” willingness of lying in bed,” “eagerness for sleep.” The zhong zang jing calls it “no sleep” or “lying in bed.” The wai tai mi yao describes it as “no sleep.” The sheng ji zong lu uses the expression “little sleep.” The he ji jv fang brands it as “little sleep.” The sa bing guang yao dubs the illness as “no sleep.” Another ancient book, jing yue uan shu, describes it as “multiple sleep.”

In traditional Chinese medicine, the term “sleeplessness” was first used by Wang Tao of the Tang Dynasty in wai tai mi yao, whereas the record about sleeplessness first appeared in nei jing. Su wen’s jen yao in zhong lun, mentions, “At the juncture between winter and spring, illness is rampant, making people want to sleep but cannot sleep and see things while sleeping.” The shang han liu shu says: “When the yang waxes and the yin wanes, one cannot fall asleep night and day ... and if the yang prevails over the yin, one is perplexed by not being able to fall asleep in the whole night.”

There is a long history of curing sleeplessness in Chinese medical archives. The nei jing says the soup of pinella ternate and sorghum can cure gastric discomfort and sleep disturbance. In the Han Dynasty, Zhang Zhong-jing invented the formulas of Coptis chinensis soup with donkey hide gelatin, Cassia soup with fossil bones and oyster, and date soup with pickled sour cabbage. All these formulas are effective to some extent. In the Tang and the Song Dynasties, more formulas were developed and they were included in various pharmacopoeias. In recent years, although new progress has been made in the curing of sleeplessness, the theories and methods have not yet been sorted out. Therefore, this plan seeks to gather the recipes, cases, views and dietary information on sleeplessness scattered in traditional Chinese medical archives, put them into book form and then sort them out according to clinical classification of modern medicine.

Keywords: eyes not closed, being unable to sleep, lying but unable to sleep, little sleep, obsession with sleep, sleep with open eyes, lying without sleep, liking to lie down, eagerness for sleep, on-and-off sleep, obsession for bed, tending to sleep, failure to sleep, drowsiness, no sleep, cat nap, sleeplessness, and nightmarish sleep.