



SLEEP THERAPY PROGRAM

Do you have difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep? Is it impacting your functioning or causing you significant distress? Do you feel fatigued all the time? Has this been going on for more than three months? If so, you may be suffering from chronic insomnia, and we can help!

Chronic insomnia is a common sleep disorder, estimated to affect at least 10 to 15 per cent of the general population.¹ Many individuals with chronic insomnia sometimes feel hopeless, as they have not responded well to many different sleep-hygiene techniques and medications. In response to this demand, QFHT allied health staff members Cynthia Leung, pharmacist, and Erin Desmarais, social worker, along with Kingston-based sleep expert Dr. Judith Davidson, developed and started delivering a sleep therapy program in 2018.

The QFHT's sleep therapy program is based on a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) approach, which is the recommended first-line treatment for chronic insomnia.² Our program employs various strategies to help individuals restore their biological sleep processes. It comprises four main components: sleep restriction therapy, stimulus control therapy, cognitive restructuring, and relaxation techniques.

Participants learn a set of techniques such as scheduling time in bed, as well as strategies to deal with thoughts that interfere with sleep. When these techniques are used together, we have observed 80 to 85 per cent of patients experience significant improvements. The benefits include less time required to fall asleep, more time spent asleep, and waking up less often during sleep.³ Results are often maintained over time. Participants wishing to come off their sleep medications also have the option to work with our pharmacist for an individualized tapering plan.

We also track participants' sleep progress by measuring the Insomnia Severity Index before and after the program. For individuals who have completed the program, we can consistently see reduction in this index, which suggests an improvement in sleep.

If you are interested in learning more about this program, please speak with your physician to submit a referral. [Click here](#) to read this article, which includes a list of resources we recommend, on our website's Programs & Services page.

Article provided by the QFHT's Erin Desmarais, social worker, and Cynthia Leung, registered pharmacist.

1. Morin et al. Prevalence of Insomnia & its treatment in Canada. *Can J Psychiatry* 2011; 56(9):540-548
2. Qaseem A et al. Management of Chronic Insomnia Disorder in Adults: A Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians. *Ann Intern Med* 2016; 165: 125-133
3. Traumer et al. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Insomnia: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Ann Intern Med* 2015 Aug 4;163(3):191-204

PATIENT PROFILE

I moved to Kingston in 2017 after living in Quebec for 46 years. I had enjoyed two long careers, first as a registered nurse and then as a financial



advisor. I was participating in many rewarding activities. Life was going great.

I developed a severe case of insomnia during the first wave of COVID-19. It began soon after the "fall back" time change in November 2020. The time change has always affected my sleep, but I wasn't able to adjust this time. My sleep, or lack of it, got worse each night. I managed to carry out my many scheduled activities via Zoom, but the bowling events, choir, and church services I enjoyed so much had all been cancelled. It was a very stressful time.

In December 2020, I started keeping a sleep diary and realized I needed help. I was sleeping less than three hours a night. Herbal teas, prescribed drugs, and over-the-counter remedies did not work. I had problems falling asleep and staying asleep. I became hyper-alert and reactive to every little noise.

In January 2021, I received an email from the QFHT's six-week, virtual sleep therapy program, on a referral from my doctor, inviting me to participate. Of course, I accepted. My sleep quality average on starting the program was 57 per cent; at the program's conclusion, it was up to 79 per cent. I was sleeping deeper and for longer sustained periods. After a program follow-up in June 2021, my sleep quality average was 86.7 per cent.

I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to work with program leaders Erin and Cynthia, whose support and caring sustained me over those six weeks.

When the clock changed back one hour in November 2021, I never even noticed.

Judith Austin