

Managing insomnia with an app

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Credit: Pexels

An app designed to treat insomnia without the use of medication, only available in Australia via a Flinders University clinical trial, has received an official recommendation from the U.K.'s National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

The NICE guidelines provide national guidance and advice to improve health and social care in England. The recent NICE report states the app, Sleepio, is a safe and effective treatment for people suffering from [insomnia](#) and could reduce the number of prescriptions for medications such as zolpidem and zopiclone, which can become addictive.

Following the news, Dr. Alexander Sweetman from Flinders University's Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health, is calling on Australian GPs and people with insomnia to get in touch to learn how the app can be accessed in Australia.

"At present, Sleepio is only available in Australia through a clinical trial so it's important doctors are aware it's an option and patients can be referred to the program and assisted," says Dr. Sweetman.

"Our previous research has shown that [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) for insomnia (or 'CBTi') is the most [effective treatment](#) for insomnia and Sleepio is a self-administered version of that."

Cognitive behavioral therapy works by targeting the underlying psychological, physiological and behavioral causes of insomnia, in contrast to medications, which simply treats the symptoms.

Through the trial, Dr. Sweetman is aiming to develop the pathway within the doctors' central software program, to help GPs identify and refer patients to the specialized digital cognitive behavioral therapy program for insomnia.

Researcher Dr. Alexander Sweetman in the sleep lab at the Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health at Flinders University.

"Currently the most common treatment for insomnia in Australia is sedative-hypnotic medications, or sleeping pills, which are potentially

addictive and not effective over the long-term," says Dr. Sweetman.

"Instead, we have a treatment with cognitive behavioral therapy, proven effective in multiple [clinical trials](#) worldwide, we just need to provide GPs with more information, accessible guidelines and tools, as well as referral and [treatment options](#) to help them to help their patients manage insomnia."

Insomnia is a common and debilitating disorder that can impact a person's physical and mental health and well-being. Symptoms include taking a long time to fall asleep, or frequently waking up throughout the night and not feeling rested the following day.

45 GPs are currently participating in the Australian Sleepio trial and have referred 200 patients to Sleepio. The trial will continue offering the app to GPs and patients throughout 2022.

"So far, patients have reported improved insomnia symptoms and around a 40% reduction in sleeping pill use," says Dr. Sweetman.

Provided by Flinders University

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