

BEFORE YOU CALL THE DOCTOR

Safe, Effective Self-Care for Over 300 Common Medical Problems

"More than lives up to its subtitle... It is a remarkably thorough and useful book that should be added to all home health libraries."

Genell Subak-Sharpe, MS

Editorial Director

*The Columbia University College of Physicians
& Surgeons Home Medical Guide*

Anne Simons, M.D., Bobbie Hasselbring,
and Michael Castleman

"An informative and easy-to-follow resource on illness prevention and medical self-care. A must for those interested in taking responsibility for their own health."

Mark Tager, M.D.

President, Great Performance, Inc.

Before You Call the Doctor is the thorough and medically responsible self-care guide everyone needs. Written in clear, easy-to-understand language, it covers the essentials of home care for hundreds of ailments, from serious illnesses such as heart failure and emphysema to everyday maladies such as colds and constipation. Each entry explains the disorder, lists effective at-home treatments, identifies when you *should* see your doctor, and highlights those signs and symptoms that warrant *immediate* professional treatment. *Before You Call the Doctor* also covers:

- First-Aid for common medical emergencies
- The seven keys to optimal health—a *lifelong* system to cut medical costs
- Men's and women's health issues
- How to stock your medicine cabinet, maintain a family health record—and much more.

Doctors are—and always have been—the treatment alternative of *last* resort, after Band-Aids, aspirin, and home remedies like Mom's chicken soup. If you want to be an informed participant in your own medical well-being instead of a passive consumer, you owe it to yourself to read *Before You Call the Doctor*, the book that belongs in the home library of anyone who's ever taken a temperature—or an aspirin.

"Truly indispensable...thousands of self-help medical remedies that work on over 300 medical conditions... If you care about your health, this is the book for you."

Charles B. Inlander

President, People's Medical Society

"A very satisfying combination of up-to-date medical advice and practical home remedies... Belongs on every family's bookshelf."

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ANNE SIMONS, M.D.

BOBBIE HASSELBRING

MICHAEL CASTLEMAN

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gest that regular vitamin C supplementation may help, too, by increasing the rate of alcohol breakdown in the body.

If you develop a full-blown hangover, rest. Take acetaminophen to relieve headache pain. Aspirin and ibuprofen also relieve headache, but they are more likely to cause stomach upset, which only adds to hangover misery. However, if you want to take aspirin or ibuprofen, take an "enteric coated" brand, which dissolves in the intestine, not in the stomach.

Ice packs also help relieve headache pain. Wrap a few ice cubes in a plastic bag, then wrap the bag in a clean cloth and apply the ice pack to the forehead for twenty minutes, then remove it for ten minutes before reapplying. An ice substitute may be used instead of ice cubes. Do not apply ice directly to the skin. This can cause the equivalent of frostbite.

Drink plenty of liquids to replace lost fluids, relieve acidosis, and soothe the stomach until the body eliminates the alcohol. Mint tea is especially soothing to the stomach. Coffee and other stimulants don't help. Neither do Valium and other tranquilizers; in fact, they interfere with the body's ability to eliminate alcohol.

Of course, bartenders the world over are fountainheads of folk hangover remedies. One venerable remedy is honey in hot water. The water certainly helps, and honey soothes the throat and digestive tract. But *never* take "some hair of the dog that bit you," that is, more alcohol. It simply compounds the problem.

INSOMNIA

Insomnia means not getting enough sleep. It also refers to difficulty falling or staying asleep.

What's Going On? Everyone needs "a good night's sleep," but how long is good enough? Most people need seven or eight hours a night to wake up feeling refreshed and perform efficiently. Recent research suggests that those who seem to do fine on just five or six hours a night actually need more sleep. As people age, they often find they need less sleep than they did when they were younger. However, they may also sleep less soundly and more fitfully.

Before You Call the Doctor. Insomnia is a major national health problem, as the enormous sleep-aid industry clearly shows. Chronic insomnia may require professional help, but for most people it's simply a result of daily stresses. Before you start swallowing any sleep medications,

and certainly before you call the doctor, try these sleep-enhancing life-style suggestions. Studies show that when used conscientiously, they help eliminate about three-quarters of even chronic sleep problems:

- Limit your caffeine consumption. Everyone knows coffee contains this powerful stimulant, but some people are unaware that tea, colas, cocoa, and chocolate also contain caffeine and/or a similar stimulant called theobromine. So do an astonishing number of over-the-counter drugs. Even coffee ice cream and coffee yogurt contain enough caffeine to disturb sleep in sensitive individuals.

- Beware of other drugs. Widely used over-the-counter decongestants, including pseudoephedrine (Sudafed and many others) and products containing phenylpropanolamine, can be as stimulating as caffeine. If you have a sleep problem and take *any* medication, ask your pharmacist if it might keep you up and, if so, if another might be substituted.

- Exercise regularly, but not within four hours of retiring. Strenuous physical activity—even housework—contributes to sound sleep, but exercising too late in the day can interfere with falling asleep.

- Establish a regular bedtime. The body's internal clock responds best to a regular schedule. Even on weekends, try going to bed and rising as you do on weekdays.

- Let go of stressors before going to bed. If you're worried about forgetting things, write them down. If you're anxious in general, increase your exercise. If you have interpersonal problems, talk them out with your spouse, friends, or relatives or seek professional counseling.

- Use relaxation techniques. Progressively tighten and relax all the muscles of your body starting with your toes and working up to your face. Or try listening to relaxing music before going to bed.

- Take a warm bath. A good soak soothes tense muscles and helps you become drowsy.

- Try warm milk. Milk contains the amino acid tryptophan, which relaxes muscles and induces sleep. Some authorities say there isn't enough in a glass of milk to have much effect, but many people swear by warm milk. Add a touch of honey, cinnamon, and vanilla for a delicious bedtime treat.

- Try an herbal sleep aid. Teas made with hops, passion flower, valerian, and chamomile have been used as sedatives for centuries, and recent research supports their effectiveness. Health food stores sell sleep-aid teas containing these herbs.

- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and a comfortable temperature. Even dim light causes unnecessary eye movements which can disturb sleep. If noise is a problem, try foam ear plugs, available at pharmacies,

or “white noise” tapes. Most people sleep most soundly in rooms kept at 67° to 70° with plenty of fresh air.

- Sleep on a firm mattress. Mattresses that are too soft or hard disturb sleep. Find a mattress that supports your back. Some people find the warmth and support of a waterbed conducive to sound sleep, as long as it doesn't slosh.

- Use your bed only for sleeping and sex. Read, work, watch TV, and talk on the phone elsewhere.

- Try sex. Lovemaking (and masturbation) are relaxing, and after orgasm, people tend to feel drowsy.

- If you can't sleep, get up. If you are unable to fall asleep within thirty minutes, don't lie there and “try” to fall asleep. Get up and stay up—read, watch TV, or listen to music or the radio—until you feel tired. Then go back to bed. If you still can't fall asleep within thirty minutes, get up again and repeat the process. At first you may bounce in and out of bed several times a night, but using this approach, most people train themselves to fall asleep within thirty minutes after a week or two.

When to Call the Doctor. Chronic insomnia that does not respond to a month of committed self-care requires professional evaluation. It may be caused by serious anxiety, depression, medications, or other problems.

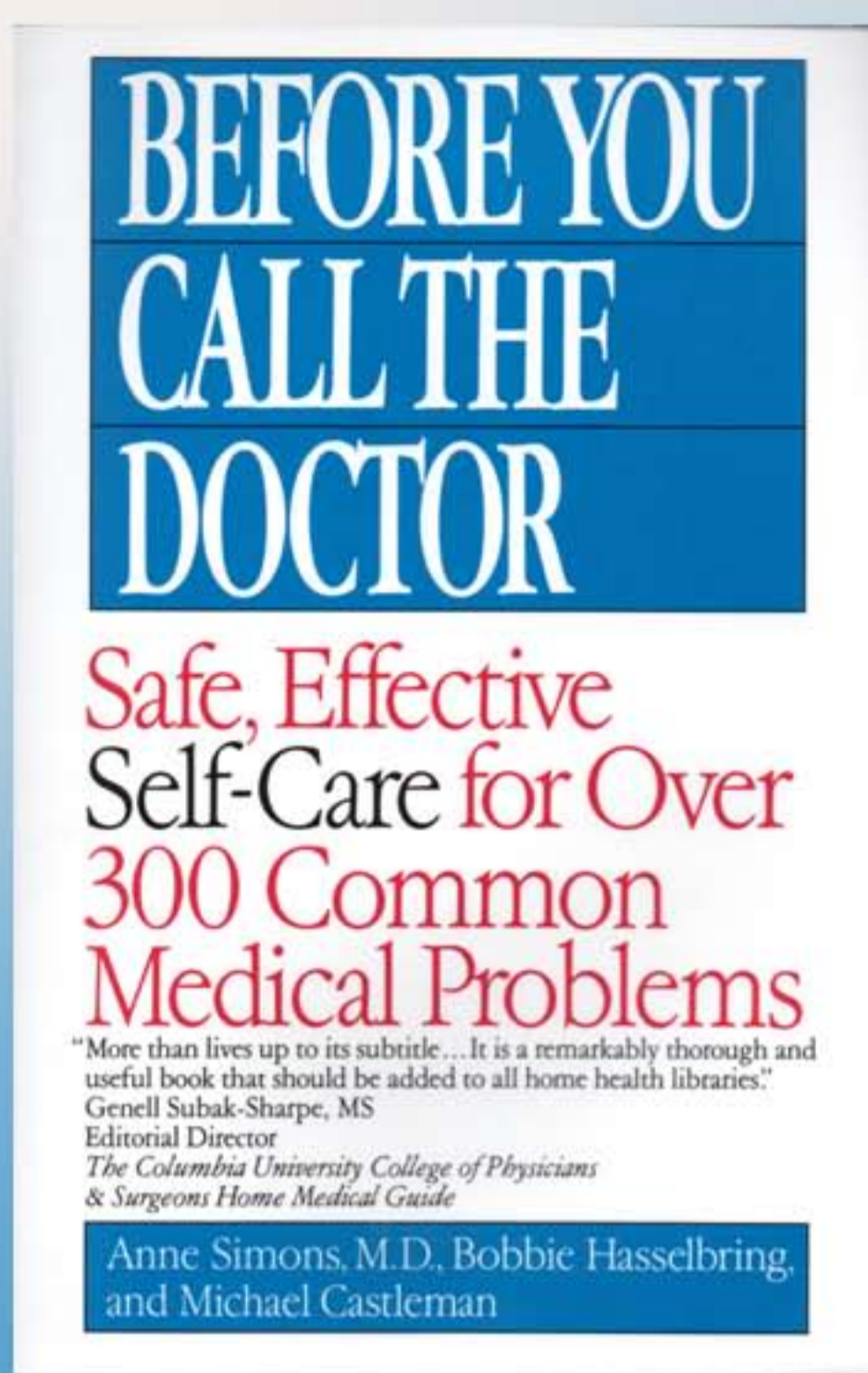
If your physician can't help you, contact the American Sleep Disorders Association for a referral to a clinic that specializes in sleep problems (see RESOURCES at the end of this chapter).

JET LAG

Jet lag is the fatigue and disorientation experienced after flying across time zones.

What's Going On? Jet lag, formally known as “circadian desynchronosis,” is a disruption of the subtle but powerful internal biological clock that regulates many body functions, such as temperature, kidney output, and normal sleep/wake patterns.

This disruption affects not only business travelers and vacationers but also the growing number of people who work odd-hour shifts, such as pilots, police, and health care workers. Jet lag is more than just a nuisance. Scientists who study the biological clock (“chronobiologists”) believe circadian desynchronosis causes reasoning lapses that contribute to hospital medication errors, police shooting incidents, and even airline disasters.



Learn More

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