## Insomnia

insomnia (失眠, *shī mián*) refers to a disorder of the Shén (神) — the mind/spirit — which is housed in the Heart. It is not just defined by the Western notion of “difficulty sleeping,” but seen as a deeper imbalance of the Heart, Zang-Fu organs, and emotional-spiritual harmony. Insomnia in TCM includes:

* Difficulty falling asleep.
* Frequent waking
* Waking too early
* Dream-disturbed or restless sleep.
* Light, superficial sleep (never feeling deeply rested)
* In severe cases: no sleep at all

The Heart stores the Shen (神) — and when Heart is out of balance, the Shen is unsettled, leading to disturbed sleep.

Sleep in TCM depends on Heart Blood and Yin anchoring the Shen, Liver Blood storing the Hun (魂) and allowing dreams to be peaceful, Kidney Yin and Essence supporting the Heart and Brain, Spleen Qi generating Blood to nourish the Heart and proper regulation of Qi and emotions. When any of these systems are disrupted, the Shen becomes restless, agitated, or unanchored — and sleep is disturbed. Common TCM Patterns of Insomnia include:

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| Pattern | Pathophysiology | Symptoms | Tongue  | Pulse |
| Heart Blood Deficiency | Shen lacks nourishment and a place to rest | Difficulty falling asleep, light sleep, palpitations, poor memory, pale complexion | Pale, thin | Thin, weak |
| Heart Yin Deficiency (sometimes with Kidney Yin deficiency) | Deficient Yin cannot anchor the Shen → false Heat flares upward | Insomnia with restlessness, night sweats, dry mouth, red cheeks, palpitations | Red, little or no coat | Thin, rapid |
| Liver Fire or Liver Yang Rising | Emotional stress or anger leads to internal Fire disturbing the Shen | Difficulty falling asleep, irritability, vivid dreams or nightmares, headaches, red eyes. | Red edges, yellow coat | Wiry, rapid |
| Phlegm-Heat Harassing the Heart | Heat and turbid Phlegm block the Heart orifices | Insomnia with agitation, chest oppression, heavy head, bitter taste, nausea | Red with yellow greasy coat | Slippery, rapid |
| Heart and Spleen Deficiency | Overthinking or worry damages Spleen → fails to produce Blood → Heart becomes deficient | Insomnia with fatigue, poor memory, palpitations, poor appetite, loose stools | Pale, thin coat | Weak, thin |
| Heart and Kidney Disharmony | Kidneys cannot support the Heart → Shen is unrooted | Insomnia with anxiety, palpitations, dizziness, tinnitus, night sweats, low back pain | Red, peeled | Thin, rapid |

In TCM, insomnia is a symptom of deeper Shen disturbance, often due to deficiency of Blood or Yin, excess Heat or Fire disturbing the Heart, obstruction by Phlegm imbalance between Heart and Kidney. The key to treatment is identifying the root pattern, calming the Shen, and restoring harmony to the internal landscape so that the spirit can rest peacefully.