NEW YORK, March 9, 2006

(CBS) More and more of the millions of Americans who have insomnia are turning to sleeping pills first, before trying other options, and exposing themselves to problems such pills could cause, according to Dr. Emily Senay. But those other options do exist and should be considered as well, she says.

The Early Show medical correspondent stresses that, "If you can find another way to get a good night's rest, it's worth exploring that. Really, that should be the first line of defense."

Insomnia, Senay points out, is defined as difficulty falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or awakening too early in the morning, when any of those situations result in impaired functioning during the day. It's one of the most common problems people complain about when they visit the doctor. A recent poll showed that three-quarters of respondents in the United States had a symptom of a sleep problem three nights a week or more.

Prescriptions for sleeping pills have been steadily rising in recent years, and Senay says that's not surprising.

She tells co-anchor Rene Syler, "You'd have to be living under a rock not to have seen commercials for some of these newer products on the market that do have advances over some of the older ones and are, in many ways, safer."

Senay adds that something we'll see even more of, as competition among sleeping pills manufacturers increases.

She says the newer generation of non-addictive drugs can be very effective in
breaking a pattern of insomnia with short-term use, but you should talk to a doctor about insomnia, so its true cause can be determined. Sometimes, sleep disorders can be the result of a more serious, underlying condition, such as depression.

The National Sleep Foundation has a checklist of warning signs that require a doctor’s attention. See a doctor if you have difficulty sleeping three nights a week or more; feel sleepy or doze off while watching TV, reading, driving or engaged in daily activities; or experience disruptions to your sleep.