

Sleeping Problems

Refreshing sleep is important for our health and wellbeing. Poor sleep can lead to drowsiness, poor concentration and other symptoms that interfere with daytime activities. The best way to treat sleeping problems is to find and manage the cause.

The amount of sleep we need depends on our age, lifestyle, personality and circumstances. Many people find that their sleeping patterns change as they get older. Most adults need 7–9 hours of sleep per night, teenagers need about 9.5 hours of sleep per night and infants need about 16 hours of sleep per day.

Sleep problems affect quality of sleep, amount of sleep or sleep behaviour. They include:

- **insomnia** – insomnia means having a problem falling asleep or staying asleep, or not feeling refreshed by sleep. It is very common and may be a symptom of another condition
- **obstructive sleep apnoea** – a condition that causes a person to stop breathing for short periods while sleeping

- **restless legs syndrome** – a condition that causes an urge to move the legs when lying down
- **sleep behaviour disorders** – such as night terrors and sleep walking.

Signs of a sleep problem include:

- finding it hard to go to sleep
- restless sleep
- waking up during the night or very early in the morning, and not being able to get back to sleep
- not feeling refreshed from sleep
- feeling tired, irritable, anxious or depressed
- finding it difficult to concentrate, remember things and make decisions.

What causes insomnia?

Things that can cause insomnia or make it worse include:

- pain or discomfort
- snoring (can be a sign of sleep apnoea)
- stress, anxiety and strong feelings (e.g. fear, anger)
- worrying about not sleeping well
- having naps during the day
- not enough physical exercise
- sleeping in a room that is stuffy, noisy, or too brightly lit
- sleeping in an uncomfortable bed, or feeling too hot or too cold
- going to bed with an empty or full stomach
- being too stimulated in the evening (e.g. by exercise, working, TV, radio)
- having caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, chocolate, cola, energy drinks) in the evening
- using nicotine (e.g. cigarettes, nicotine replacement therapy products)
- using illegal drugs
- drinking too much alcohol in the evening
- changing work shifts or time zones (e.g. jet lag)
- needing to pass urine often during the night (e.g. men with prostate disease)
- pregnancy
- menopause
- some medicines. Ask a pharmacist
- some medical conditions (e.g. anxiety, depression, other sleep problems, allergy).

Self care

Sleeping 'DOs':

- Remember that your sleep needs may change over time.
- Sleep in a darkened, quiet room with plenty of fresh air.
- Use a comfortable, supportive mattress and pillow.
- Use clean bedding suitable for the weather.
- Allow yourself time to wind down and relax before bedtime.
- Learn and use relaxation techniques to manage stress.
- Get enough exercise during the day to feel physically tired each night.
- Spend at least 30 minutes outdoors each day to help set your body clock.
- Limit your daily amount of caffeine.
- Limit your daily amount of alcohol.
- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each day (this trains your body to develop a regular sleep cycle).
- Have a calming bedtime routine such as:
 - A warm bath or shower
 - A warm milk drink or a light snack
 - Listening to peaceful music and/or reading for a while
 - Slow, deep breathing.

Sleeping 'DON'Ts':

- Don't nap during the day, especially after 3pm. Keep sleep for bedtime.
- Don't work or watch TV in your bedroom. Keep your bedroom for sleeping, relaxing and sex.

- Don't have pets or equipment with lights or noise in the bedroom.
- Don't exercise close to bedtime.
- Don't have a heavy meal close to bedtime.
- Don't drink a lot of fluid in the evening (to help limit night time visits to the toilet).
- Don't have caffeine close to bedtime.
- Don't drink alcohol close to bedtime (alcohol can affect sleep quality).
- Don't smoke (especially close to bedtime).

Getting to sleep

If you cannot get to sleep, or if you wake up and cannot get back to sleep, get out of bed.

- Write down worries or problems and decide to deal with them in the morning.
- Do something relaxing or repeat your calming bedtime routine.
- Return to bed only when you feel sleepy.

Medicines

The best way to treat sleeping problems is to find and manage the cause. Sometimes sleeping tablets are also needed to help correct a sleep problem. Most sleeping tablets should be used at the lowest possible dose for the shortest possible time (preferably less than 14 days in a row). Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

- It is possible to become dependent on some sleeping tablets if you use them every night.

Important

Seek medical advice if you:

- can't sleep due to illness, pain or discomfort
- wake up coughing, wheezing or unable to breathe
- snore, especially if you wake yourself or others
- have been taking sleeping tablets every night for more than four weeks
- have trouble falling or staying asleep more than 3 nights per week
- are always tired during the day.

If you are having trouble sleeping, write down your sleeping and waking patterns (e.g. keep a diary) for a few weeks. This can help you and your doctor to find the cause. You can download a sleep diary from website www.nps.org.au/sleep.

- If you have been taking sleeping tablets every night, when you stop taking them you may have a few nights of worse sleep.
- It is possible to become tolerant to some sleeping tablets, so that you need to take higher and higher doses to get the same effect.
- Some sleeping tablets can cause daytime drowsiness, confusion and unsteadiness. This can lead to accidents and falls, especially in older people.
- Sleeping tablets may increase the effects of alcohol. It can be dangerous to have sleeping medicines and alcohol in your blood stream at the same time.

For more information

Australasian Sleep Association

Website: www.sleep.org.au

Sleep Disorders Australia

Website: www.sleepoz.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS Medicine Wise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.***

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: