

Insomnia: Improving Your Sleep

Insomnia means that you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. It is a common problem. Most people will have sleep problems now and then because of temporary stress, worry, or an irregular schedule. But when you have trouble sleeping for weeks or months, it can lead to health problems. Worrying about it only makes it worse.

The good news is that if you can change the way you think about sleep, and then make some simple lifestyle changes, you may improve how well you sleep. This topic will give you some tips on how to do just that.

- Lots of things affect how well you sleep. Keeping a sleep diary can help you figure out what helps and also what may get in the way of a good night's sleep.
- Changing one or more of your habits may improve how well you sleep

What affects healthy sleep?

Lots of things affect how well you sleep. For example, what, when, and how much you eat and drink can affect your sleep. Eating a large meal close to bedtime can make it hard to sleep, but a light snack right before bed may help you sleep. Your exercise habits and the physical environment of your bedroom can also affect how well you sleep. Certain habits can make it hard to fall asleep and stay asleep.

The more you know about what affects your sleep, the more likely you are to make lifestyle changes that can lead to better sleep.

Why change your everyday habits?

The choices you make every day often become the habits that are a regular part of your lifestyle. Changing habits can lead to a lifestyle that promotes better sleep. Lifestyle habits and sleep practices are strongly related to overall sleep quality. For example:

- Alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but it also may upset your sleep. If you usually have a couple glasses of wine before bedtime and seem to always wake up at 3 a.m., try having a drink with no alcohol (and no caffeine) instead.
- Regular exercise can help you sleep better. Moderate exercise, vigorous exercise, and "everyday" activities all count as exercise.

How can you sleep better?

Here are some tips that may help you sleep more soundly and wake up feeling more refreshed. You might want to start slowly at first. Pick one thing to change, and see how that change affects your sleep. After a week or two, try to add another change. As you make changes, you might want to keep a sleep diary to figure out what things help you to sleep better and what things may get in the way of a good night's sleep. Step by step, your sleep should improve. If it doesn't, talk to your doctor.

Food and drink

- Limit caffeine (coffee, tea, caffeinated sodas) during the day, and don't have any for at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.
- Don't drink alcohol late in the evening. You may fall asleep with no problems, but drinking alcohol before bed can wake you up later in the night. Otherwise, drink in moderation. Try to limit alcohol to 2 standard drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.
- Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime. But a light snack may help you sleep.
- Don't go to bed thirsty. But don't drink so much that you have to get up often to urinate during the night.

Healthy habits

- Go to bed at a regular bedtime every night.
- Wake up at the same time each day, including weekends, even if you haven't slept well.
- Get regular exercise. Don't exercise within 3 to 4 hours of bedtime, because the activity can make it hard to get to sleep.
- Get plenty of sunlight in the outdoors, especially in the morning and in late afternoon.
- Set aside time for problem solving earlier in the day so that you don't carry anxious thoughts to bed. Keep a notepad by your bed to write down any thoughts or worries that may keep you up or wake you up during the night.
- Do something relaxing before bedtime. Try deep breathing, yoga, meditation, tai chi, or muscle relaxation. Take a warm bath. Play a quiet game, or read a book.

In bed

- Reserve the bed for sleep and sex. A bit of light reading may help you fall asleep. But if it doesn't, do your reading elsewhere in the house. Don't watch TV in bed.
- Be sure your bed is big enough to stretch out comfortably, especially if you have a sleep partner.
- Use earplugs or sleep in a different room if your partner's snoring keeps you awake. If you notice that your partner is sleeping on his or her back, turn your partner to his or her side. This may help your partner stop snoring. You may also want to encourage your partner to see a doctor to find out what may be causing him or her to snore.
- Reduce the noise in the house, or mask it with a steady low noise, such as a fan on slow speed or a radio tuned to static. Use comfortable earplugs if you need them.
- Keep the room cool and dark. If you can't darken the room, use a sleep mask.
- If watching the clock makes you anxious about sleep, turn the clock so you can't see it, or put it in a drawer.
- Use a pillow and mattress that are comfortable for you.
- Consider making your bed off-limits to your children and your pets. Their sleep patterns may be different from your own and may affect your sleep.

Things to avoid

- Don't take naps during the day.
- Don't use tobacco, especially near bedtime and/or if you wake up during the night. Nicotine is a stimulant, which can keep you awake.
- Don't lie in bed awake for too long. If you can't fall asleep, or if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep within 15 minutes or so, get out of bed and go to another room until you feel sleepy.
- Where to go from here
- Now that you have read this information, you are ready to take some steps toward improving your sleep. You may have to try a few different lifestyle changes until you find what works best for you. If these changes don't help you sleep better after you have tried them for 2 weeks, talk to your doctor.
- If you would like more information on sleep problems, the following resources are available:
 - [Organization](#)

National Sleep Foundation <http://www.sleepfoundation.org>

The National Sleep Foundation, an independent nonprofit organization, can provide you with brochures on sleep disorders and a list of accredited sleep disorder clinics.

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