

Insomnia: What You Need to Know

General Information

Insomnia is the difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. Anyone at any age can have problems sleeping. Women and older adults can have more problems than men.

Short-term insomnia may last 1 to 4 weeks. Long-lasting (chronic) insomnia may last months or even years.

Several things can affect your sleep such as:

- your environment (room temperature, noise)
- napping during the day
- exercising before bed
- your emotions (stress)
- medicines you may be taking
- use of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine or marijuana
- how you feel physically.

You may have one or more reasons keeping you from sleeping well.

How Much Sleep You Need

There is no magic number of sleep hours. The amount you need depends on your age:

- Babies may need as much as 16 to 18 hours of sleep each day.
- School-age children and teens need about 9 to 10 hours of sleep each night.
- Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. You may need more or less than this. Do not try to “get by” on less than your body needs.
- After age 60, sleep will likely be lighter and you may wake up in the middle of the night.

How to Tell if You are Getting too Much Sleep

You may be getting too much sleep if you are not getting your normal activities done, such as going to work or doing your laundry.

You should feel rested and refreshed in the morning. Being tired may also be a sign of too much sleep.

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Suggestions for Sleeping Well

Getting enough sleep is good for your health. Some ways to help you sleep better include:

- Get regular exercise.
 - Find a good temperature for sleeping (colder is usually better than warmer).
 - Go to bed only when you are tired.
 - Wake up at the same time every day.
 - Avoid taking naps during the day. If you do nap, try to sleep less than 30 minutes.
 - Avoid eating a heavy meal or spicy foods before bedtime. If you are hungry at bedtime, eat a light snack (such as a glass of warm milk or piece of fruit).
 - Avoid drinking alcohol 4 to 6 hours before you go to bed.
 - Avoid drinking or eating caffeine within 8 hours of bedtime.
 - Avoid nicotine before bed.
 - Don't check the internet, social media or emails on electronic devices in bed.
 - Remove kids and pets from your bed.
 - Use your bed only for sleep and sex. Let your body "know" that bed is for sleeping.
- Avoid noise and bright rooms.
 - Avoid watching the clock.
 - Do not take your worries to bed.
 - Talk with your health care provider if you think you may have depression, anxiety or excessive stress.
 - If you take medicine, ask your health care provider or pharmacist if the medicine may be causing sleep problems.
 - If you work nights, cover your windows to block sunlight. This will help your body adjust.

When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have a problem sleeping or if you feel very tired (fatigued) during the day. Most sleep disorders can be treated. Your provider can refer you to a sleep specialist.

**Adapted from the
National Institutes of Health.**