

Strategies for a Good Night's Sleep

What Is Insomnia?

Insomnia is a common problem. People with insomnia have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. A lack of sleep can cause people with insomnia to be sleepy during the day. Sometimes insomnia only lasts for a short time. Or, it can last for a long time. Insomnia can affect your work, school, social life, and health. Some conditions that can cause insomnia or make it worse are depression, anxiety, allergies, and pain. Insomnia can also happen because of poor sleep habits.

How Is Insomnia Treated?

Adults with insomnia may use over-the-counter or prescription medicine to help with sleep. But over-the-counter sleep medicine (diphenhydramine [*Benadryl*]) can make insomnia worse in kids. It's best to **look for the cause of insomnia before starting treatment with medicine**. Keeping a sleep diary for one to two weeks is a smart way to start. Tracking sleep times, caffeine and alcohol intake, etc. can provide clues. Changing these behaviors might be all that's needed to help you sleep better. By maintaining **good sleep habits (sleep hygiene)**, you may be able to avoid taking medicine. In kids, sticking with a regular sleep schedule and a calming bedtime routine can help.

GOOD SLEEP HABITS

Stick to a regular sleep schedule---even on weekends.
Get regular exercise---avoid exercise in the late evening.
Go to bed only when you are sleepy.
Put your worries away when you go to bed.
Do something relaxing and enjoyable before bedtime.
Make your bedroom quiet and comfortable.
Avoid large meals just before bedtime.
Use your bedroom only for sleep and sexual activity.
If you do not fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, get up and go to another room. Return to bed only when you feel drowsy.
Remove your clock from sight.
Do not nap during the day. If you must nap, do so only for 30 minutes in the early afternoon.
Avoid alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine.
Avoid frequent use of sedatives.
Spend time outdoors at the same time each day.
Have your pharmacist check your medicines, in case any of them keep you from sleeping.
Avoid bright lights from the TV, computers, video games, etc. before bed.

Adapted from Jermain DM. Sleep disorders. *PSAP*. 1995:139-154.

What If Good Sleep Habits Don't Help?

If you or your child is still not getting a full night's sleep, even with good sleep habits, you should talk to your pharmacist or other health care provider. He or she will need to figure out the cause of your insomnia. A medicine may be needed. Even if medicine is used for insomnia, you should still keep up good sleep habits.