



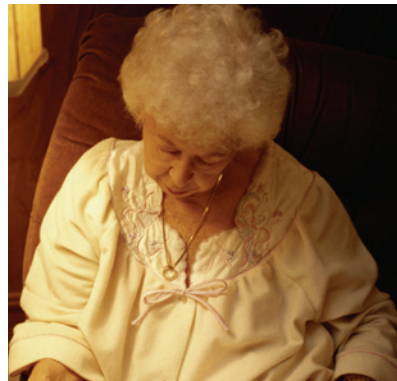
# Sleeping Problems

**A good night's sleep is important for well-being, and a poor night's sleep can lead to daytime symptoms that interfere with daily activities. Being unable to sleep as well as we would like, or for as long as we would like, is called insomnia. Insomnia is a common complaint with many different causes.**

The amount of sleep we need depends on our age, lifestyle, diet, personality and circumstances. Most adults need 6-10 hours of sleep every night.

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 sleeping problems?

Insomnia can have many causes including:

- Pain or discomfort (e.g., cramps)
- Sleep apnoea – a condition where a person regularly stops breathing for short periods while sleeping
- Snoring – can be a sign of sleep apnoea
- Stress, anxiety and emotional issues (e.g., unhappiness, fear, anger)
- Worrying about not sleeping well
- Having naps during the day, particularly for older people
- 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 over-stimulated in the evening by exercise, working, TV or radio
- Having caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, chocolate, cola) in the evening
- Using nicotine (e.g., cigarettes, nicotine-replacement therapy products)
- Using illicit drugs
- Drinking excess 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
- Some medicines (ask a pharmacist)
- Some medical conditions (e.g., depression).

## Self care

- Remember that your sleep needs may change over time.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques to manage stress.
- If you nap during the day you may need less sleep at night. Try to nap earlier in the day or not at all.

- Do enough regular exercise to feel physically tired each night, but avoid strenuous exercise close to bedtime.
- Limit daily caffeine and alcohol and avoid either close to bedtime.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime.
- Sleep in a darkened, quiet room with plenty of fresh air.
- Avoid having pets and highly illuminated digital clocks in the bedroom.
- Keep the bedroom for sleeping, relaxing and sex, not for working or watching TV.
- Use a comfortable, supportive mattress and pillow.
- Use clean bedding appropriate for the climate.
- Start going to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each day, as part of training the body to develop a regular sleep cycle.
- Have a calming bedtime routine such as:
  - Having a warm bath
  - Having a warm milk drink and a carbohydrate snack
  - Listening to peaceful music and/or reading for a while
  - Slow, deep breathing.

## Getting to sleep

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

- Write down worries or problems and decide to deal with them in the morning

## Important

Consult a doctor or pharmacist 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 regularly for more than four weeks
- Continue to be sleepy during the day.

- Do something relaxing or perhaps repeat your calming bedtime routine
- Return to bed when feeling sleepy.

## Medicines

The best way to treat insomnia is to find and manage the cause. Sometimes people also need medicines to help correct a sleep problem. Most sleeping tablets should be used at the lowest possible dose for the shortest possible time. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

- It is possible to become dependent on some sleeping tablets if they are used continuously for more than two weeks.
- It is possible to become tolerant to some sleeping tablets, so that you need to take more and more to get the same effect.
- Sleeping tablets can cause daytime drowsiness, confusion and unsteadiness, especially in older people.
- Sleeping tablets may increase the effects of alcohol. The combination of sleeping tablets and alcohol should be avoided.
- Some herbal and complementary medicines may help relaxation and sleep.

## Related fact cards

- *Anxiety*
- *Bladder & Urine Control*
- *Depression*
- *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- *Prostate Problems*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Smoking series*

## For more information

**A doctor** – listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book.

**A local community health centre** – listed in the white pages of the phone book under 'C'.

**Health/Insite** – website [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

**Pharmacy Self Care Support** – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

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

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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