



Basic Facts About Sleep



Good quality sleep is critical to a person's health. Sleeping well can help a person cope with stress, solve problems, and get better during an illness or when recovering from an injury. Too little sleep can result in drowsiness, irritability, and problems concentrating. A lack of sleep can also cause memory and physical problems. Sleep gives the body a chance to recharge itself. During sleep, the body **restores** tissue, **builds** bone and muscle, and **strengthens** the immune system. Sleep also helps the brain to function at its peak!

What Happens When You Sleep

Even with closed eyes, a very relaxed state of wakefulness continues during the initial phase of falling asleep. During this first stage of the five stages of sleep, the body and brain are still active. As sleep progresses, the remaining four stages are experienced. Note that each stage is different. During stages one through four, sleep slowly gets deeper and more restful. The fifth stage is known as REM sleep. REM stands for rapid eye movement. Dreams usually occur during the REM stage. While it's common to wake as sleep shifts from one stage to the next, most people fall right back to sleep.

Sleep Rhythms

Humans are naturally programmed to be awake during the day and to sleep at night. This automatic routine is called the **circadian rhythm**. The circadian rhythm can't be easily reversed, even during periods of shift work or working at night.

Getting Enough Sleep

Most of us have been taught to believe we need eight hours of sleep each night to get us through the following day. This belief can be so strong it can affect the way someone feels if they don't get at least eight hours of nightly sleep. But the truth is that the amount of sleep required for good health and performance differs for everyone. While most experts recommend adults get between seven and nine hours of sleep each night, some people need more, and some people need less. So it's important for you to determine the amount of sleep **you** actually need to feel well rested. Generally, if you don't feel chronically fatigued, you're probably getting enough sleep.



WARNING SIGNS OF SLEEP PROBLEMS:

- Having a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Having a hard time staying awake during the day.
- Sleeping a lot and still feeling tired when it's time to wake.
- Tossing and turning frequently while sleeping.

Having a hard time **falling asleep** can be due to:

- Feeling "**on-edge**," on-alert, or nervous. This is how you feel when you believe that staying awake is necessary to protect yourself or others from danger.
- Feeling discomfort from chronic pain, stomach and intestinal problems, or other medical conditions.
- Thinking (**one's own thoughts**). For example, thinking about something bad that has happened or might happen, worrying about things in general, or just thinking about what you're going to do tomorrow. Even thinking about how little sleep you're getting ("Another night without sleep!") can make it harder to fall asleep.



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What are Sleep Problems?

Sleep problems can be caused by medical or mental health conditions, stress, pain, waking up to go to the bathroom, side-effects of certain medications (prescribed or over-the-counter), drinking alcohol, using illegal drugs, diet, inadequate exercise or an irregular sleep schedule due to work hours.

Note that sleeping poorly once in a while is a normal reaction to stress. But people who sleep poorly more than occasionally are more likely to be depressed, irritable, or anxious. Poor sleep may also be associated with attention, concentration, and memory problems and can make you feel drowsy and tired throughout the day. Constant sleep problems can hurt family life and relationships and can even hurt your job performance and increase your risk of accidents. Prescribed or over-the-counter drugs are often just a temporary fix.

Some of the things that can make it hard to **stay asleep** are:

- Using drugs and alcohol.
- Bad dreams, nightmares, or sleep terrors.
- Thrashing around in bed or actively moving arms or legs during bad dreams or nightmares.
- Waking up and checking that the house is safe after hearing a noise. Many combat veterans wake up frequently during the night to do a perimeter check or check the area.

The following list includes things that can increase a person's risk for sleep problems.

- Losses (*such as death*) or the loss of a relationship such as divorce.
- Grieving.
- Relationship, family, financial, school and work-related stress.
- Health problems (*illnesses or pain*).
- Mood problems such as anxiety or depression.
- Caffeine (*coffee, tea, soda, chocolate*).
- Smoking, chewing, or dipping tobacco.
- Consuming alcohol or other drugs.
- Poor sleep environment (*sleeping in conditions that are too hot or too cold, or too brightly lit*).
- Changes in sleep routine/schedule (*working night hours, shift work, jet lag*).
- Eating too much before going to bed resulting in heartburn, acid reflux, or dehydration from very salty foods.
- Loud and frequent snoring.
- Sleep disorders such as restless legs syndrome, sleep apnea, or narcolepsy.
- Having a partner in bed who has sleep problems.



THE MOST COMMON SLEEP DISORDERS:

- Insomnia.
- Nightmares.
- Sleep Terrors.
- Sleep Apnea.
- Restless Legs Syndrome.
- Narcolepsy.