

# Fact Sheets for Families

## Good Sleep

---

While we know the importance of good diet, regular exercise and healthy life-styles for our physical health, most of us don't realize the importance of sleep for maintaining good health and mental and emotional well-being.

### What is the impact of sleep problems?

Sleep deprivation doesn't just make us sleepy and tired the next morning. It has measurable negative effects on our work performance and physical and mental health. Sleep problems can cause reduced energy, weight gain, greater difficulty concentrating, and increased stress, depression, illness, mistakes and accidents, including fall-asleep crashes. Relationships may also suffer.

### How much sleep is enough?

The amount of sleep needed each night varies among people. Each person needs from 5 to 10 hours of sleep in order to be fully alert during the day. An adult may need 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night. If you do not get enough sleep night after night, you will build a "sleep debt." The only way to reduce this debt is to get the amount of sleep your body needs.

### What are the common types of sleep disorders?

- **Insomnia** means that you do not get enough sleep, or that your sleep is of poor quality. You may have difficulty falling asleep, wake up frequently during the night and have trouble returning to sleep, or wake up too early in the morning.
- **Problem sleepiness** is when sleepiness interferes with daily routines and activities, or reduces the ability to function.
- **Sleep apnea** is a serious, potentially life-threatening breathing disorder in which a person has brief interruptions of breathing during sleep.
- **Narcolepsy**, a chronic disorder with no known cause, is excessive and overwhelming daytime sleepiness, even after adequate nighttime sleep.

### What are the causes of sleep problems?

Sleep problems are caused by many factors, including:

- stress
- diet
- environmental noise
- extreme temperatures
- lack of exercise
- change in the surrounding environment
- medication side effects
- inadequate sleep
- sleep interruptions, such as by small children
- jet lag
- medical conditions such as restless legs syndrome and hot flashes
- mechanical or structure problems in the airway.

### Tips for a good night's sleep

- **Exercise regularly.** Regular daily exercise can help relieve stress and tension; just make sure you finish your exercise at least three hours before bedtime.
- **Avoid naps** if you have trouble falling asleep at night.
- **Drink and eat lightly.** Avoid large heavy meals, caffeine and sugar before sleeping. Alcohol can also cause sleep problems.
- **Make sure your bed and bedroom are comfortable.** Sleep in a room with reduced light, reduced noise and a temperature not too cool or hot.
- **Keep regular hours.** Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time every day (even the weekends) to establish regular routines.
- **Develop a sleep habit.** Doing the same thing just before sleeping signals your body to settle down for the night.
- **Get out of bed if you can't sleep.** Read a book, listen to music, or try something else relaxing until you feel sleepy.
- **Deal with your worries long before bedtime.** Don't use your time in bed to worry over your problems.

### When to seek medical help

Many problems related to sleep can be solved by changing your lifestyle, diet and exercise habits. Over-the-counter sleep aids may help you sleep on occasion, but they are not recommended for long-term use and should be used with caution. If your sleep problems continue for more than a week, are bothering you, or if your sleepiness affects the way you function, you may need to get help from your health care provider or a sleep specialist.

