

Improve Sleep Problems



All of us need enough sleep to function well during the day. Having just one night of poor sleep can make it more difficult to pay attention to our studies or work; make us sleepy throughout the day; cause us to make poor decisions; and leave us feeling irritable, grouchy, slowed down or restless. When many nights of little sleep add up, getting through the day can become a losing battle!

Sleep problems frequently occur as a part of depression. In fact, sleeping problems — either sleeping too much or having difficulty sleeping enough — are one of the symptoms of major depression. Although some sleep problems may require medication to get better, there are things you can do to help improve your sleep. By improving your sleep hygiene (your sleep habits), you can get rid of any habits that are making it harder for you to get a good night's rest.

Ways to Improve Your Sleep

- 1. Keep a regular sleep schedule.** Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. It can take your body several days to weeks to adjust to a new sleep schedule, so sleeping in or staying up late on weekends really leaves your body confused.
- 2. Watch what you eat and drink near bedtime.** Foods or drinks with caffeine (e.g. sodas, tea, chocolate) can keep you up. Avoid eating big meals or being hungry before bedtime. Some people find milk or milk drinks (e.g. Ovaltine) can help them fall asleep. Milk contains tryptophan, which causes sleepiness.
- 3. Eliminate bad habits.** Drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes both prevent you from getting a good night's sleep.
- 4. Make sure your bedroom is set up for sleep.** Try to make sure the temperature of the room is comfortable, there are few noises, and the room is dark.
- 5. Exercise regularly.** Getting vigorous exercise in the afternoon (at least 4-6 hours before bedtime) has been found to result in better sleep.
- 6. Get outside and see the sun.** Sunlight helps the body control its biological clock. This clock lets us know when to feel sleepy and when to be alert.
- 7. Use your bed only for rest or sleep.** Don't watch TV or do homework in bed.
- 8. If you don't fall asleep within 10 or 15 minutes, get out of bed.** Do a quiet, dull activity until you are feeling sleepy and try again.
- 9. Find a relaxing activity to do before bed.** A warm bath, quiet music or talking with a friend can all help you make the change from daytime to nighttime. Find what works best for you.

