

**Psst!**

Plan to Stay in Shape Today



# LOOKING TO SLEEP BETTER?

A guide to better understanding  
and improving your sleep health

2<sup>nd</sup> edition



About a third of our lives is devoted to sleep. This need may seem trivial, but it is essential to our survival. It is therefore crucial to be concerned about the quality of our sleep, both on the physical and psychological levels. Sleep is our ally, so we shouldn't neglect the hours we spend in bed. However, it is not always easy to get rid of insomnia and get a good night's sleep.

This guide has been designed to help you better understand and improve your sleep health. A host of tips and tricks to put into practice in your daily life to help you drift off in no time.



### Did you know that...

- ♦ One in three adults have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or having a restful sleep.
- ♦ One in 10 adults suffer from sleep problems with negative consequences during the day.

Zzzz



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# THE ABCs OF SLEEP

## The different stages of sleep

A typical night's sleep is composed of cycles in which different stages alternate. Altogether, a night is about 4 to 6 cycles long. Non-REM sleep consists of 4 stages, followed by REM sleep. Here are the characteristics of the different stages of sleep:

### Stage 1

#### Falling asleep

Your awareness of the outside world diminishes and your thoughts wander. This stage represents 3 to 5% of your night. You're not completely asleep yet, but it won't be long now.

### Stage 2

#### Light sleep

You are really sleeping—but waking up is relatively easy. It accounts for about 50 to 60% of your night.



## Stages 3 and 4

### Deep sleep

These are the stages during which sleep is most restorative. That's when you're the hardest to wake up.

You are not very receptive to the outside world, unless there is a strong stimulus or if it has a particular meaning for you (e.g. your name or your baby's crying).

These stages occur mainly during the first half of the night and can represent 10 to 20% of your sleep time.

### REM sleep

This stage, commonly called REM (rapid eye movement), is characterized by eyes that move quickly under the eyelids. The body is motionless, but the brain is very active. It is this stage that is associated with dreams. REM sleep occurs mainly during the second half of the night and lasts about 20 to 25% of your night.



## The benefits of sleep

Sleep is directly related to the quality of personal, family and professional life. The benefits of a restful sleep are multiple. Increased alertness, better performance and good mood are examples of the benefits of good sleep. Good sleep also facilitates the consolidation of new learning, problem solving and adaptation to daily emotional experiences. The benefits of sleep are even felt at the level of your immunity, as good sleep can improve your protection against some diseases. In short, to be and stay healthy, it is important to get enough sleep.

Some apps, often linked to smart watches, say they can analyze your sleep. These tools, although imperfect and approximate, can be useful in keeping a sleep diary.



## What is a good night's sleep?

There are no strict rules about the number of hours of sleep to be respected. The amount of sleep required varies from person to person and according to the stages of life. However, the experts agree on an order of magnitude illustrating the average needs according to the various stages of life. The following table shows the corresponding data for each age group. Of course, these figures are averages and your needs may differ. Some people need more sleep to be functional, while others need only a few hours. The important thing is to feel rested when you wake up. In short, it is enough to sleep a sufficient number of hours to be in harmony with your own biological clock and to feel rested when the morning comes.



## Average sleep requirements by stage of life

		Recommended average daily sleep
Stages of life	Newborn 0 - 3 months	14-17
	Child 4 - 11 months	12-15
	Child 1 - 2 years old	11-14
	Child 3 - 5 years old	10-13
	Child 6 - 13 years old	9-11
	Teenager 14 - 17 years old	8-10
	Young adult 18 - 25 years old	7-9
	Adult 26 - 64 years old	7-9
	Adult 65 years and over	7-8

Source: sleepfoundation.org

## Sleep hygiene

Sleep hygiene is a series of lifestyle habits that influence sleep. Good sleep hygiene is often the key to restorative sleep.

Here are some tips and tricks for good sleep hygiene.

- ♦ The bedroom should be designed to incite sleep. It is therefore essential to have a quiet environment with as little noise as possible.
- ♦ The room must be dark in order to promote melatonin secretion. This hormone, also known as the "sleep hormone", is secreted when exposure to light decreases. Darkness is therefore essential to get a good night's sleep. Opaque curtains are an interesting option. Also, remember to dim the lighting during the evening to prepare your body for sleep.



- ◆ The bedroom must be set at a moderate temperature. Temperature that is too high increases the time to fall asleep and can cause waking up during the night. On the other hand, if the temperature is too cold, you may not be able to sleep. The ideal temperature would be around 18°C. As sleep is favoured by a slight drop in temperature, it can be a good idea to lower the house thermostats. If needed, you can add blankets.
- ◆ A comfortable mattress and pillow are also essential. It is easier to let yourself go to the land of dreams if you feel yourself comfortable!
- ◆ It is important to eat in reasonable quantities and at an appropriate time. Eating too much at dinner or too close to bedtime can interfere with your sleep as the digestive system must focus on digesting food. If you go to bed right after eating, your sleep slows down, and your digestion is disrupted. Bloating and cramping may occur. A word of advice: to avoid overeating at dinner, eat a larger lunch or dinner instead. Conversely, if you eat too little and go to bed hungry, your body will send you a signal to let you know that you need nutrients, and this will keep you awake.
- ◆ Relieve stress before going to bed. Even if it has been a tough and stressful day, it is important not to drag these worries into your bedroom. Make a list of your concerns or things to remember for the next day before going to bed. This will prevent you from thinking about it all the time and will help you sleep.







## GREAT SLEEP TIPS

- ♦ Adopt a **regular sleep schedule**
- ♦ Create an **environment conducive** to sleep
- ♦ **Avoid taking a nap after 3 p.m.** and **limit its length** (ideally 10 to 20 minutes)
- ♦ **Don't stay in bed** if you don't sleep after 20 minutes
- ♦ **Keep your bedroom for sleep** and **sexual activity**
- ♦ **Opt for a balanced diet** and **eat at reasonable times**
- ♦ **Limit the consumption of stimulants** such as tea and coffee at least 5 hours before going to bed
- ♦ **Relieve stress** before going to bed
- ♦ **Reduce your level of evening activity**





# SLEEP DISORDERS

## Insomnia

The feeling of not having closed your eyes at night is very unpleasant. When this impression is repeated and persists for several days, affecting our functioning, we may wonder if we suffer from insomnia.

The quality of sleep and how it is assessed varies greatly from one person to another. That's why describing insomnia using a simple definition is not so easy.

Insomnia can be defined according to **when** the problem occurs at night:



### BEDTIME

**INITIAL INSOMNIA:** Difficulty falling asleep at bedtime for more than 30 minutes

Frequent or prolonged night awakenings lasting more than 30 minutes

### WAKE UP

Early morning awakening with inability to fall asleep: resulting in a total of less than 6.5 hours of sleep





It is also possible to define insomnia according to its **duration**:

Type of insomnia	Duration	Causes	Examples
Transient	2 to 3 days	Disruptive factors with a short-term impact	Consumption of a stimulant such as coffee
Acute	A few days to a max of 3	Following a difficult or stressful event	Bereavement, job loss
Chronic	More than 3 months	May be related to a health condition or a vicious circle of anxiety related to bedtime	Depression, anxiety, pain





## What are the risk factors for insomnia?

No one is safe from suffering from an insomnia problem at some point. However, some factors are known to increase this risk. Here are some of them:



**Aging:** As the brain ages, the duration of deep sleep decreases considerably. This results in a lighter sleep and an increase in the number of nocturnal awakenings.



**Female gender:** Hormonal changes experienced by women (e.g. puberty, menstruation, menopause) are probably related to insomnia.



**Some chronic diseases:** Some chronic diseases, such as asthma, gastroesophageal reflux disease and arthritis, can cause insomnia.



Some medications, and even natural health products, can also have a negative impact on your sleep. Consider seeking advice from your health care professional.



**Stress of daily living and mental health problems:** Some situations, such as bereavement or job loss, can disrupt mental balance and interfere with your sleep. People suffering from anxiety or depression may tend to have insomnia. Indeed, anxious people see their anxious thoughts take up all the space when it comes time to go to bed, because the distractions of the day decrease and allow these thoughts to resurface. Depression, on the other hand, can also have the opposite effect and make you sleep all the time.



**Sleep-disrupting substances and medications:** Coffee, tea, chocolate, cola-type soft drinks, energy drinks, tobacco, alcohol, drugs are substances that can affect the quality of sleep. It is recommended to limit their consumption, especially in the 5 hours preceding bedtime.



**Having an environment that is not conducive to sleep:** Excessively bright lighting, noise, inadequate temperature or uncomfortable mattresses are all conditions that can affect the quality of sleep.



**Scheduling disruptions or changes in sleep routine:** Jet lag, night work or frequent changes to your schedule can cause you to experience insomnia. Indeed, these elements mean that you cannot maintain a good sleep hygiene. In addition, it is not uncommon to suffer from insomnia when sleeping in a hotel or with a friend.

## Other conditions

The following section will define some sleep disorders. If you think you may have one of these disorders, talk to your health care professional, who will be able to guide you.



**Sleep apnea:** This condition is characterized by respiratory arrest during sleep. These stops significantly disrupt sleep and can lead to several consequences, such as attention disorders, loss of libido, headaches, etc. There are solutions to help people with sleep apnea. If you think you have it, talk to your healthcare professional.



**Restless Legs Syndrome:** This is a disorder that manifests itself in an intense need to move the legs during the night. This syndrome is often the cause of a sleep disorder. In some cases, it is possible to find the cause and fix the problem. However, it is often the case that the cause is unknown and that we have to deal with drugs.



**Enuresis:** This problem is often referred to as "bedwetting". Enuresis is when a child over 5 years old regularly urinates in bed during sleep. Boys would be more affected than girls. Medications and tools (such as alarm devices) are available, discuss them with your health care professional.



**Nightmares:** We all know what a nightmare is and the unpleasant feeling it causes when we wake up. Be aware that nightmares can be the cause of anxiety for those who suffer from them. It may be appropriate to discuss this with a health care professional if nightmares poison your nights.



**Sleepwalking:** This is a state of semi-consciousness where the person walks while sleeping. This condition usually occurs during slow and deep sleep. Sleepwalking itself is not dangerous; however, moving without being conscious can be dangerous (e.g. a fall down a staircase).



**Narcolepsy:** This is a disorder that, unlike insomnia, is characterized by significant drowsiness, even including involuntary sleep during the day. This disorder can even lead to restrictions on certain occupations, given the danger associated with unintentional falling asleep.





## MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT SLEEP PATTERNS

**Myth** **Regardless of when you go to bed or get up, the important thing is to sleep for about the same number of hours each night.**

**Reality** A regular schedule is part of good sleep hygiene. It is therefore important to maintain a stable internal clock for both waking time and bedtime. Also, and this may seem odd, to achieve a regular bedtime, it is suggested to start by setting the waking time. Above all, lie down only when you feel the need to sleep. Listen to your body, watch for the signs it sends you, such as yawning or heavy eyelids. Ideally, always go to bed and get up at the same time, both on weekdays and weekends.

**Myth** **It doesn't matter to have a shorter night, it is possible to compensate for the lack of sleep in the following days.**

**Reality** Bad news! Unfortunately, it is not possible to make up for lost hours or make reservations for more difficult nights. Our body needs a certain level of wakefulness and sleep, in 24-hour periods, to be fully effective.



**Myth** Taking a nap before dinner can help to get enough energy for the rest of the evening.

**Reality** After a hard day, it can be tempting to take a nap on the couch on the way home from work. At the same time, you will feel better, but you may have difficulty falling asleep at night. A nap can disrupt the wake-sleep cycle. It is therefore strongly recommended that people suffering from insomnia avoid taking naps. If the nap is taken before 3 p.m., the impact would be less negative.



### Did you know that...

The ideal length of a nap for an adult would be 10 to 20 minutes to feel rested, without affecting wakefulness and the ability to fall asleep at night.

**Myth** Exercising before bedtime helps you sleep better.

**Reality** It is true that physical activity is beneficial for sleep. It is recommended to do about 30 minutes of physical activity per day. However, it is important to choose the right time of day to be active. Too much activity a few hours before bedtime can have a stimulating effect and thus interfere with falling asleep. Allow at least an hour before going to bed to relax. Instead of running in the late evening, choose a low-intensity walk, yoga or meditation. Finally, having the same routine before going to bed is a good way to let your brain know that it will soon be time to sleep.





**Myth** If sleep doesn't come, you have to stay in bed, it will happen eventually.

**Reality** It's just the opposite! If you do not fall asleep or wake up in the middle of the night without being able to go back to sleep, it is best to get up and wait until you feel tired before going back to bed. If you are awake for more than 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity. Relax under a dim light, the sleep will eventually show up.



Avoid looking at the time during the night. Calculating the remaining hours of sleep can cause unnecessary stress.

**Myth** Reading emails on your smartphone in bed is one way to relax before going to sleep.

**Reality** Although reading emails may seem like a quiet activity, it is quite challenging. Television, cell phones and tablets are devices to be kept outside the bedroom. These devices produce strong light that can delay the secretion of melatonin, the hormone that induces sleep. It is recommended to reserve the bedroom for sleep and sexual activity only. Reading under dim light is a much more appropriate activity.



**Myth** **Alcohol helps you sleep better.**

**Reality** Alcohol has a depressant and sedative effect, so it can potentially help you fall asleep. However, it affects the quality of sleep by increasing the number of nocturnal awakenings, especially in the second half of the night. In addition, regular drinkers tend to develop a tolerance to this sedative effect of alcohol. Alcohol is therefore considered a "false friend" of sleep. It should be noted that drug use can have the same consequences. Finally, also consider reducing your fluid intake in the evening to avoid waking up at night to use the bathroom.

**Myth** **Sleep before midnight is more restorative.**

**Reality** Night owls will be happy to know that this popular belief is probably an urban legend. What is true, however, is that the first few hours of sleep are the most important for recovery, regardless of when you go to bed. The important thing is to get enough sleep to satisfy your internal clock.





## TREATING INSOMNIA

The treatment of insomnia consists of different interventions. It all starts with good sleep habits. However, despite this, insomnia sometimes persists and affects the daily lives of people suffering from it. To successfully solve insomnia problems, it is important to find the cause and fix it. In some cases, medication may be considered to help you rest and become functional again.

The main objectives in the treating of insomnia are:

- ◆ Prevent symptoms during the day
- ◆ Get enough quality sleep
- ◆ Avoid the problem becoming persistent

In an ideal world, an optimal sleep routine is achieved without the use of medication.



Remember that insomnia can be a symptom of a physical or psychological health problem and that a medical assessment is essential if your sleep difficulties persist. Talk to your health care professional about it.

**IMPORTANT:** Whether they are prescription, over-the-counter or even natural health products, sleep promoting products may not be right for you. Always consult a health care professional to ensure that the product is suitable for you.



### Over-the-counter drugs

Several commercial products are available over the counter to promote sleep. However, most of them all contain the same active ingredient, diphenhydramine. It may be found alone or in combination with other drugs to treat other problems such as pain, for example. Unfortunately, this drug is not without side effects (e.g. dry mouth, confusion, etc.) and drug interactions. This product should not be used to treat persistent insomnia. Finally, be aware that the resulting sleep is often described as non-restorative and that a residual sleepiness effect such as a "hangover" may be present when you wake up. As mentioned above, before taking any over-the-counter medication to help you sleep, it is important to consult your health care professional.



### Prescription drugs

If your insomnia persists despite the changes in your sleep hygiene, a consultation with your doctor would be necessary. Some medications, commonly called "sleeping pills", may be prescribed to help you recover by causing sleep or calming anxiety. However, these drugs do not eliminate the cause of insomnia. It is important to follow the recommendations of your health care professional when using sleep medication.



### **Natural health products**

The popularity of melatonin has increased significantly in recent years. It is a hormone produced naturally by our body when daylight decreases, to indicate to the brain that it will soon be time to sleep. Melatonin production may be disrupted for some people, such as travellers, due to jet lag, flex time workers or those with certain health problems. If insomnia is associated with low melatonin levels, then some efficacy can be expected. Melatonin is not a sleeping pill, but rather a product that promotes sleep without forcing it.

Other natural health products, such as valerian, passion flower, lemon balm and hops, could help sleep through, among other things, their calming properties. Again, ask your health care professional to evaluate whether this type of product is compatible with your condition and medication. Finally, very often, these products are available as herbal teas and it is the comfort of a hot drink that provides a calming effect. It may therefore be appropriate to simply consume a hot drink, free of natural health products, before going to bed.



### **Psychological help**

It can sometimes be difficult to change our sleep habits and, above all, our perception of insomnia on our own. Consulting a health professional specializing in sleep disorders may be a solution. Indeed, some studies have shown that an approach aimed at voluntarily changing a person's sleep behaviour may be more effective than medication in controlling insomnia.



## **IN CONCLUSION...**

Sleep problems are common, and no one is immune to have them. By applying the rules of good sleep hygiene mentioned in this guide, you considerably increase your chances of success towards a restful night's sleep. Try to implement some of the tips. You may be pleasantly surprised by the results. On that note, good night and have nice dreams!



## USEFUL SOURCES AND LINKS

**Canadian Sleep Society**

<http://scs-css.ca>

**Fondation Sommeil**

<https://fondationsommeil.com>

**Centre d'étude des troubles du sommeil (CETS)**

<http://www.cets.ulaval.ca>

**Mental health services, help and support in your community**

<http://www.esantementale.ca>

**Familiprix**

[www.familiprix.com](http://www.familiprix.com)

## IN THIS GUIDE

The ABCs of sleep

Sleep disorders

Myths and realities about sleep patterns

Treating insomnia



Pharmacists are solely responsible for the professional activities carried out as part of the practice of pharmacy and who use various tools, including PSST! (Programme de soins et santé pour tous).