
SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON SLEEP & INSOMNIA



Insomnia means poor sleep. About one third of adults do not get as much sleep as they would like.

It is defined as:

- Difficulty in getting to sleep
- Difficulty staying asleep
- Waking up too early
- Not feeling refreshed after a night's sleep despite adequate time and opportunity to sleep.

This can then have a negative impact of quality of life as it can cause:

- Tiredness (fatigue) and loss of energy in the daytime.
- Poor concentration.
- Loss of interest in usual activities.
- Irritability.
- Depression and anxiety.
- Inability to do things as well or as much as usual - for example, work, social activities, exercise. Errors might occur at work or whilst driving, which could have serious consequences.

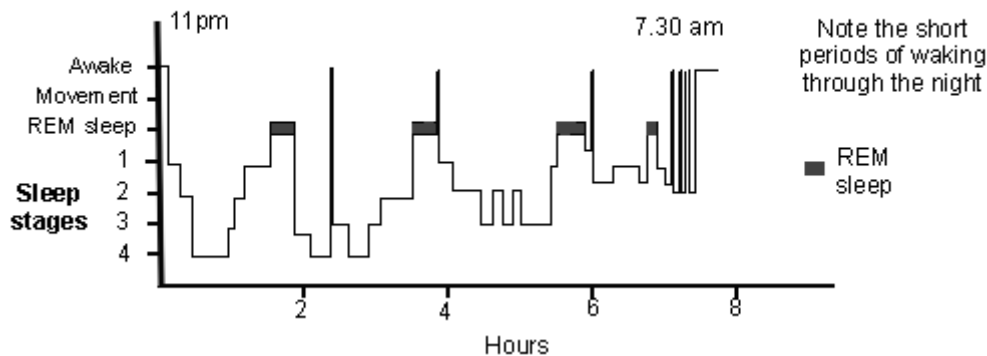
What is a normal amount of sleep?

Different people need different amounts of sleep. Although some people function well with just 3-4 hours sleep a night, 6-8 hours sleep per night is an average amount.

Most people establish a pattern that is normal for them in their early adult life. However, as you become older, it is normal to sleep less. Many people in their 70s sleep less than six hours per night.

Normal Sleep is comprised of deep sleep, REM (rapid eye movement) sleep and short periods of waking for 1-2 minutes occur about every two hours or so, which are normally not remembered.

Hypnogram - a recording of a normal night's sleep, displayed here as a chart



Causes

Poor sleep may develop for no apparent reason. However, there are several possible causes which include the following:

- **Concern about waking up during the night** - you may feel that to wake in the night is not normal and worry about getting back off to sleep. You may then have an impression of having a bad night's sleep, even when the total amount of time asleep was normal.
- **Temporary problems** such as a work or family problem, jetlag, a change of routine, a strange bed, etc. Poor sleep in these situations usually improves in time.
- **Anxiety or depression**
- **Other illnesses or conditions**, such as pain, breathlessness, apnoea, indigestion, cough, itch, hot flushes.
- **Unrealistic expectations** – some people just need less sleep than others. If your sleep pattern has not changed, and you do not feel sleepy during the day, then you are probably getting enough sleep. Older people and people who do little exercise tend to need less sleep. Whatever the initial cause, worrying about feeling tired may make the problem worse.
- **Screen time** – the light from electronic devices can interfere with the normal-night cycle.
- **Stimulants and some medicines**, for example:
 - *Alcohol* - alcohol causes broken sleep and early morning wakefulness.
 - *Caffeine* - caffeine is a stimulant and may cause poor sleep. It is found in tea, coffee, some soft drinks such as cola, and even chocolate. It is also an ingredient in some painkiller tablets and other medicines.
 - *Nicotine* (from smoking) - nicotine is a stimulant and may cause poor sleep.
 - *Diuretics* ('water tablets') - diuretics increase the frequency that you pass water. This can disrupt sleep.
 - *Steroids* - steroids can cause difficulty getting to sleep.
 - *Cold remedies* containing pseudoephedrine - pseudoephedrine is a stimulant and may cause poor sleep.

How to improve poor sleep

You often need to tackle the problem on multiple fronts as there is often more than one causative factor at play. Examples of helpful measures include:

- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol six hours before bedtime.
- Do not have a heavy meal just before bedtime.
- Regular daytime exercise can help you to feel more relaxed and tired at bedtime but avoid any strenuous exercise within 4 hours of bedtime.
- Establish fixed times for going to bed and waking up; avoid sleeping in after a poor night's sleep and avoid daytime naps. If you keep to a pattern, you are more likely to sleep well.
- Get up at the same time each day, seven days a week, however short the time asleep. Do not use weekends to catch up on sleep.

- The bedroom should be a dark, quiet, relaxing place to sleep; it should not be too hot, cold, or noisy.
- Try to relax and wind down before going to bed. Do not do anything that is mentally demanding within 90 minutes of going to bed - such as studying.
- Do not watch television or use any back lit device e.g. tablets and phones, for an hour before trying to go to sleep. The use of non-backlit e-readers and paper books is ok.
- Do not use the bedroom for activities such as work, eating or watching television.
- Hide your alarm clock under your bed. Many people will clock watch, and this does not help you to get off to sleep.
- If after 30 minutes you cannot get to sleep, get up and go into another room and try to do something else (light reading or listening to relaxing music) until you feel sleepy, then go back to bed.
- Relaxation techniques, mindfulness meditation techniques or a mediation app.
- Psychological treatments called cognitive and behavioural therapies

What about sleeping tablets?

Sleeping tablets are not usually advised. Problems with sleeping tablets include:

- Drowsiness the next day.
- Clumsiness and confusion in the night if you must get up.
- Tolerance to sleeping tablets may develop if you take them regularly. This means that, in time, the usual dose has no effect.
- Many people become dependent (addicted) on sleeping tablets if they take them for longer than a couple of weeks.
- They can interact with other medicines leading to increased drowsiness and falls.
- Memory problems over the longer term.

If a sleeping tablet is prescribed, it will normally be for a short course (a week or so) to get over a particularly bad patch and to establish a sleep pattern. Other medicines that may be used to help sleep include melatonin and some antihistamines.

When to contact your GP

- *If you feel that illness or medication is causing poor sleep.* Treating any underlying condition that is causing the problem can help to promote sleep. Depression and anxiety are common causes of poor sleep and can often be managed.
- *If the self-help tips mentioned here have not worked* and the insomnia is significantly affecting your daily life.
- If you are currently taking sleeping tablets and would like to reduce them or stop them completely

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/
- Sleep Station - www.sleepstation.org.uk

If you have further questions:

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an **emergency** call **999**