



# The Power of a Good Night's Sleep

If you do not get the sleep you need, you are more likely to suffer depressive moods, difficulty with memory and alertness, more nighttime falls and excessive daytime sleepiness. Explore the causes of common sleep problems and remedies for a better night's sleep.

**MOST ADULTS** require seven to nine hours of sleep each night, but today many Americans only average 6.9 hours of sleep per night. There is a tendency in our society to only focus on the waking hours, but sleep is an important part of each day.

"Make sleep a priority," says Daniel Rifkin, MD, board-certified sleep specialist and board-certified neurologist at Plantation General Hospital Sleep Disorders Center in Plantation, Fla. "People who do not get a full night or even an adequate night of sleep put themselves at risk for accidents, poor mood and serious health ramifications, including negative impacts to their immune systems and cardiovascular health."

## Common Symptoms

Sleeping patterns change as we age, but regularly experiencing sleep disturbances or waking up tired is not normal. Nearly two-thirds of older Americans report sleep problems at least a few nights a week, but only one in eight have been diagnosed with a sleep disorder and even fewer seek treatment.

Talk to your doctor if you experience more than one of the following:

- **struggling to fall asleep or maintain sleep**
- **frequent awakenings during the night**
- **waking too early; unable to go back to sleep**
- **waking up tired or daytime sleepiness**
- **snoring**
- **gasping or pauses in breathing**
- **unpleasant sensations in your legs**

## Just Breathe

Snoring and sleep apnea are breathing disorders that affect your ability to sleep soundly. Nearly 40 percent of adults snore, but, when severe, snoring can cause daytime sleepiness and disrupt your bed partner's sleep.

"Obesity is a good indication that the patient might be a snorer, but that is the tip of the iceberg," says Peter B. McCullagh, RPSGT, director of the sleep center at North Florida Regional Medical Center in Gainesville, Fla. "If the patient has respiratory pauses

## Sleep Myths and Truths

**Sleeping in on the weekends will make me more alert all week.**

**MYTH.** Sleep is not like money that you can save for a later withdrawal. However, you can go into sleep debt, which negatively impacts your health, mood and performance. To ensure you're well rested, sleep eight to ten hours each day.

**Heavy meals, meetings, long drives and warm rooms make me sleepy.**

**MYTH.** All of the above may reveal sleep deprivation or sleep debt, but these things by themselves do not cause sleepiness.

**A nightcap will help me sleep.**

**MYTH and TRUTH.** Alcohol can help you unwind, which can allow you to go to sleep, but a few hours later it can also cause the release of catecholamines—hormones released by the body during times of stress. Catecholamines that can interrupt your sleep cycle include dopamine, norepinephrine and epinephrine, also known as adrenalin.

## Sleep Hygiene

Think back to the best night's sleep you have ever had. Was it the pillow? The room? The mattress? The linens? Many people point to an upscale hotel as the place where they've gotten the best sleep. Take a lesson from five-star inns to make your own room the perfect sanctuary for restful sleep.

### SET THE STAGE

A dark room devoid of distractions is paramount for a good night's sleep. TVs, computers and other electronic devices, such as a telephone, should be banned. Your bed should be used only for sleep, resting and intimacy.

Transitioning from a hot shower or bath before bedtime to a cool bedroom will signal the body it is time for sleep. Winding down with a book or other calming activity, such as journaling, can also help "turn off your brain."

### DO'S AND DON'TS

**DO** maintain a set wake-up and go-to-sleep schedule each day, regardless of whether it is a weekday, weekend or holiday, to allow your body to fall in sync with its circadian rhythm or biological clock.

**DON'T** nap if you are having trouble sleeping through the night.

**DO** exercise regularly to promote sound sleep but refrain from vigorous exercise at least four hours before bedtime.

**DON'T** regularly use caffeine. Caffeine keeps many people awake, so restrict caffeinated beverages, such as coffee, tea or soft drinks, and avoid eating chocolate for four to six hours before bedtime. (See "Hidden Caffeine" on page 5.)

**DON'T** use tobacco products or consume alcohol in the evening as it can prevent rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Avoid both for better rest.

## Self-help for Snorers

If you or your partner snores, try these tips:

- Avoid heavy meals three hours before bedtime.
- Avoid drinking alcohol four hours before bedtime.
- Avoid taking sleeping pills, antihistamines and sedatives before bedtime.
- Sleep on your side instead of your back.
- If you have an adjustable bed, tilt the head of your bed up four inches.
- Develop better muscle tone and lose weight by adopting a healthy and active lifestyle.

and gasps in addition to snoring, that is a good indication for sleep apnea. Such gasping is indicative of an apneic episode where breathing stops. This can last from 10 seconds to two minutes."

### Treating Sleep Apnea

A sleep study or polysomnography can determine the cause of your sleeplessness by charting your brain waves, breathing and heartbeat as you sleep. Such studies are conducted during the patient's normal sleeping hours (day or night). During the study, a small clip monitors the oxygenation of blood, while leg sensors record any movement.

Once diagnosed, the first option that gives good results and is considered the "gold standard" is a mask device worn during sleep that provides continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) to provide and maintain an open airway. Use of a CPAP machine lowers patients' risk for heart disease and allows them to get the rest they need.

Dental appliances fitted for patients may also be helpful for snoring and mild sleep apnea. Surgery can help with snoring and mild, obstructive sleep apnea by reducing or eliminating tissue in the throat from the soft palate, uvula, tonsils, adenoids or the tongue. Surgery should only be considered when less invasive approaches are unsuccessful.

"Untreated sleep apnea is a known risk factor for high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes," says Dr. Rifkin. "People who experience

daytime sleepiness or wake up exhausted should talk to their doctors."

### Medication—A Last Resort

Insomnia is a common sleep disorder characterized by having trouble falling asleep, frequent awakenings, waking too early or having difficulty falling back to sleep. Sleep medications can offer an effective, short-term solution only after all other potential causes are addressed, such as sleep-disordered breathing and patients' sleep hygiene issues.

Over-the-counter sleep agents often contain antihistamines, included for their drowsy side effects. Consumers should be especially careful with these products, as they are not intended to improve the quality of sleep and also can cause confusion and disorientation upon waking.

"The majority of medications increase the amount of time you are asleep, but also decrease the time you spend in stage 3 and stage 4 sleep, the stages where you dream and have more restorative sleep," says Mark Newnham, PharmD, BCPS, BCNSP, clinical coordinator at Lawnwood Regional Medical Center and Heart Institute in Ft. Pierce, Fla. "Medications to promote sleep should be used as minimally as possible, for durations shorter than a few weeks and only at the direction of your physician."

*For information on getting a good night's sleep, visit [www.h2u.com](http://www.h2u.com) and search for sleep.*



## Once Upon a Mattress

Researchers at Oklahoma State University have found a direct correlation between the quality of a person's bed and the quality of his or her sleep.

An uncomfortable or worn-out mattress can keep you from reaching those deep levels of sleep, resulting in being less refreshed each day.

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### EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT MATTRESS

A new bed can deliver high quality sleep and reduce back pain by providing adequate support. Evaluate your mattress every five to seven years, and consider purchasing a new mattress when:

- you sleep better at a hotel or friend's house
- you awake with numbness, stiffness, aches or pains
- your mattress shows visible signs of wear, such as sags, lumps or exposed interior

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### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The wide range in mattress prices can reflect a wide range of quality. Take your time when shopping for a mattress and don't be shy; lie on a mattress at least 15 to 30 minutes in the showroom to make sure it provides adequate support and is comfortable for your neck and back.

"Approach your new mattress as an investment in your health," says Peter B. McCullagh, RPSGT, director of the sleep center at North Florida Regional Medical Center in Gainesville, Fla. "You spend one-third of your life asleep and in bed. Don't cut corners when it comes to ensuring a good night's sleep."

*For more information on choosing a good mattress, visit [www.h2u.com](http://www.h2u.com) and search for **mattress**.*

