



Heart

Sleep Problems

Good sleep is necessary for good health. Experts say we need seven to nine hours of good quality sleep each night to stay in good health. Not getting enough sleep can stress the body in many different ways. Over time, it can:

- Increase your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and coronary artery disease
- Increase your risk of heart attack, stroke and death from cardiovascular disease
- Change the hormones that control your eating behaviour, possibly causing you to gain weight
- Increase tiredness: This makes you too tired to make healthy lifestyle changes, and causes unhealthy lifestyle choices. It makes you less able to cope well with the normal challenges of life
- Increase stress, anxiety and depression

Recognizing sleep problems

Many things can make you unable to get enough sleep. These include medical conditions and medications, pain, depression and anxiety, caffeine, alcohol, life stresses, environmental factors (like light and noise), shift work and even aging. It can be helpful to think about the quality of your sleep on a regular basis. Many people have trouble sleeping once in a while. It is nothing to worry about. In fact, worrying about being unable to sleep only makes sleep problems worse. But if you often have trouble sleeping, you might be helped by keeping a sleep diary for a few weeks. If you write down how many hours you spend in bed, how many times you were awake, what woke you (e.g., pain, noise) and the overall quality of your sleep, this will help you figure out if you might be helped by changing your sleep habits or getting specialized sleep treatment.

Learn about sleep problems at [sleepfoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org)



Sleep hygiene: How to get a better sleep

Set up a sleep schedule

- Plan to sleep seven to nine hours every night.
- Have a regular bedtime and get up at the same time every day.
- If you have trouble sleeping at night, do not make up for it with naps or sleeping in.

Control your sleep environment

- Keep your bedroom dark and silent.
- Make sure that the temperature, bed and bedding (sheets and blankets) are comfortable.
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex (no work, TV or video games).
- Set up a sleep routine (the things you do every night to get ready for bed)
- Have a calming routine before you go to bed.
- Do things that relax you at least one hour before bedtime, outside of your bedroom. These may be meditation, relaxation, yoga, reading or a calm conversation.
- Go to bed only once you are sleepy. Get up if you do not fall asleep within 20 minutes and do something that calms you in another room until you are ready to sleep.
- Do not use substances or do anything in the evening that can damage your sleep
- No food or drinks with caffeine: it is a drug that keeps people awake. It can take four to six hours before it is out of your blood stream.
- No smoking (nicotine).

- No alcohol or drugs: they damage the quality of your sleep and make you wake up before you are rested.
- No physical activity for a few hours before sleep: it can wake you up.
- Be around natural light during the day. Don't look at the computer, television or electronic tablet screens a few hours before going to bed. The type of light they use stops our natural sleep hormone (melatonin) from working properly.

Try not to think about stressful things around bedtime

Do not worry if you can't sleep well for one or two nights. This can happen to everyone! You will still be OK the next day. Stressful thoughts about sleep problems can make them worse. Learn to let them go!

Some people still struggle with sleep even when they try all of these suggestions.

Talk with your healthcare team if:

- You continue to have trouble sleeping
- You are very sleepy in the day or if you have trouble concentrating on things you have to do
- You snore or if your partner notices that you stop breathing during the night (Sleep apnea)
- You have trouble doing things where you need to concentrate or pay attention, like driving
- Your legs are uncomfortable or twitching and keep you from sleeping.

Talking about your sleep problems with your healthcare team can help you find out if you should visit a sleep clinic to learn if you have a sleep disorder.

Related information

To find useful services to help you on your journey with heart disease, see our **services and resources** listing.

Beat heart disease. Beat stroke. Beat as one.