
Mood and sleep

Summary

- Getting enough sleep is vital for our overall health and wellbeing.
 - A bad night's sleep can make it difficult to concentrate and leave you lacking energy.
 - Long term sleep deficiency can increase the risk of chronic health problems such as heart disease and diabetes.
 - There are many ways you can improve your sleep habits.
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Getting enough sleep, and the right type of sleep, is vital for our overall health and wellbeing. While you sleep, your body works to support healthy brain function and maintain your physical health. And for children and young people, sleep is how their bodies and minds grow and develop.

When you do not get enough sleep, you feel tired, you find it hard to concentrate and remember things and you may be grumpy. Lack of sleep can also impair your judgement and impact your physical coordination. So not getting enough sleep affects the way you feel, think, work, learn and get along with other people.

If you are having problems getting to sleep or staying asleep, or if you often feel tired during the day, you may need to work out what's happening. But the good news is most sleeping problems are easily fixed.

Sleep and moods

Think about how one bad night's sleep, or not enough sleep, makes you feel the next day. For many of us, we're grumpy and irritable, we find it difficult to concentrate, and we have no energy. We can overreact when things don't go our way, and we may find we're less excited if something good happens. So it is easy to see how ongoing sleeplessness can be a worry.

Long term sleep deficiency can increase the risk of chronic health problems such as heart disease and diabetes. It can also significantly affect your mood.

Sleeplessness and mood disorders are closely linked. And it can work both ways – sleep loss can affect your mood, and your mood can affect how much and how well you sleep.

Studies show people who are sleep deprived report increases in negative moods (anger, frustration, irritability, sadness) and decreases in positive moods. And sleeplessness is often a symptom of mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety. It can also raise the risk of, and even contribute to, developing some mood disorders.

Your mood can also affect how well you sleep. Anxiety and stress increase agitation and keep your body aroused, awake and alert. You might find you can't turn your brain off, your heart beats faster and your breathing is quick and shallow.

So getting enough sleep and the right kind of sleep is important.

How much sleep do you need?

How much sleep you need depends on your age, physical activity levels, and general health.

- Children and teenagers need 9–10 hours of sleep a night. Younger children tend to go to sleep earlier and wake earlier. As children grow into teenagers, they seem to get tired later and sleep in later.
- Adults need around 8 hours sleep each night. We tend to need less sleep, as we get older.

These are some general guidelines. If you (or your children) are tired during the day, you may need more sleep.

Some tips on getting a good night's sleep

If you've been having trouble getting enough good sleep, the good news is there are many **ways you can improve**

your sleep habits. Try these tips:

- Get a routine and stick to it. Try going to bed around the same time every night and getting up at the same time each morning.
- Avoid drinking coffee and alcohol too close to bedtime. And finish eating at least two hours before your head hits the pillow.
- Keep TVs and iPads out of your bedroom.
- Make your bedroom a haven. Make sure your bed is comfortable. Turn the lights down as you get into bed. Read using a bedside light.
- Try some simple meditation, like closing your eyes for 5–10 minutes and focusing on taking deep, slow breaths.
- Enjoy a warm bath.
- Don't lie awake watching the clock. If you are tossing and turning, try getting up and reading a book for half an hour or so before trying to go to sleep again.

And if you still can't sleep?

So what can you do if you can't sleep when you want to, or if you can't stay asleep?

The first step is to **talk to your GP**. They will help you work out whether a **common condition** is affecting your sleep, such as:

- insomnia
- jet lag and shift working
- sleepwalking, nightmares and night terrors
- restless legs
- snoring
- sleep apnoea.

Your GP can talk to you about some non-medical treatments for sleep disorders, such as relaxation training.

Smiling mind has useful techniques for children and adults. Other strategies include stimulus control and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

Your GP may also prescribe you medication or sleeping tablets, which can help you fall asleep. But medication will not be enough in the long run. It can help you fall asleep, but it won't help you with an underlying problem like stress or anxiety. It also becomes less effective over time (as your body gets used to it). And it can be addictive.

Remember...

- We all need enough sleep, and the right type of sleep, to be happy and healthy.
- In the long run, not getting enough sleep can affect our moods as well as our physical wellbeing.
- There are lots of things you can try to improve your sleep quality and quantity.
- But if you try these things and you still can't sleep, talk to your GP.

Where to get help

- Your GP
- Sleep disorder clinic

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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