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**Sleep**  
*Better*

## Operation Sleep Well



When you sleep well, you feel well. Quality sleep can mean the difference between feeling positive and mentally sharp with energy to enjoy your day and, alternatively, dragging yourself from 1 activity to another and longing for bedtime.

What's keeping you from sleeping better? Many people experience acute (short-term) insomnia (inability to sleep). Others develop chronic insomnia for months or years and struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep despite feeling tired.

Insomnia doesn't always have a cause, although some insomnia cases are related to emotional issues or other factors, including chronic pain, restless legs syndrome, sleepwalking, allergies and acid reflux.

Work with your health care provider to find personal solutions, and adopt these habits:

- Sleep on schedule.
- Quiet your mind, relax your body and leave worries for wake time.
- Cut back on caffeine and skip the alcohol.
- Review your medications with your provider.
- Get some exercise.
- Shut down electronic devices well before bedtime.



### Understanding Sleep

Your brain is very active during sleep. Sleep affects your daily functioning and your physical and mental health in many ways that researchers are just beginning to understand:

- During sleep, you usually pass through 5 phases of sleep. These stages progress in a cycle from stage 1 to REM sleep, then the cycle starts over again with stage 1.
- Stages 3 and 4 are the most refreshing of the sleep stages — it is this type of refreshing sleep that you crave when you're very tired. It's more difficult to awaken someone during these stages, and when awakened, a person will often feel groggy and disoriented for a few minutes.
- Foods and medicines affect whether we feel alert or drowsy and how well we sleep. Caffeine and heavy meals affect sleep. Drugs such as diet pills and decongestants stimulate some parts of the brain and can cause insomnia, or an inability to sleep. Antidepressants suppress REM sleep.
- Smokers often sleep lightly and tend to wake up after 3 or 4 hours due to nicotine withdrawal — another good reason to quit tobacco.

**The bottom line:** Good sleep is essential to living well. To feel better now and protect long-term health, don't shortchange yourself on slumber.



# Rate Your Sleep Habits

❶ Do you go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends?

Yes (1) No (0)

❷ Do you engage in a relaxing, pre-bed routine?

Yes (1) No (0)

❸ Do you ban stressful and distracting activities from the bedroom, such as paying bills or working?

Yes (1) No (0)

❹ Do you avoid electronic devices in the bedroom before you go to sleep?

Yes (1) No (0)

❺ Do you exercise regularly, but not within an hour or 2 of bedtime?

Yes (1) No (0)

❻ Is your bedroom cool (60-67), dark, and comfortable?

Yes (1) No (0)

❼ Do you avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol too close to bedtime?

Yes (1) No (0)

❽ Do you avoid going to sleep hungry or too full?

Yes (1) No (0)

❾ Do you ensure you don't drink too much liquid before bed?

Yes (1) No (0)

❿ Do you keep your pets out of the bedroom?

Yes (1) No (0)

## How did you do?

**8 to 10 points:** You have healthy sleep habits. Continue your routine.

**4 to 7 points:** Nicely done. You have some good sleep habits, but you also have areas you can improve.

**1 to 3 points:** Work on all the issues with “no” answers to improve your sleep habits and to start paying down your sleep debt. Getting a good night's sleep is worth the effort.

## What is Insomnia?

You have **insomnia** if you are unable to sleep well enough to function normally.

The most common cause involves psychological issues — stress, worry or depression. Any medical condition that causes discomfort, such as arthritis, allergies, heartburn or hot flashes, can disrupt sleep. So can sleep environment. Whether you have short-term or long-term insomnia, try keeping a sleep journal for 2 to 3 weeks.



## Sleep Apnea and Your Weight

If you feel very sleepy or exhausted, despite apparently sound sleep, it could be **sleep apnea**. With this condition, breathing stops for short periods during the night. People who are overweight are more at risk. Considering that two-thirds of people have weight concerns, millions may not be getting the restorative sleep they need. Weight loss usually improves sleep apnea. Your health care provider can recommend other measures, such as sleeping on your back (**positional therapy**) and **Continuous Positive Air Pressure**, a device that uses air pressure to hold your airway open.



## Sleep to Better Health

Millions of Americans have trouble sleeping, and poor sleep may be causing you more than fatigue.

### Why? Sleep deprivation is connected to numerous health problems:

→ People with insomnia or sleep apnea (breathing cessation) have increased risk for cardiovascular conditions, such as high blood pressure, stroke, coronary heart disease and irregular heartbeat.

→ Insufficient sleep also raises the risk for type 2 diabetes, depression and metabolic changes linked to obesity.

### The good news? You can improve your sleep. Here's how:

First, try exercise. Even a 10-minute exercise session can help improve your sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF). More exercise is even better. Try walking briskly or swimming laps for 30 minutes. Try to schedule exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime.



The NSF's 2013 Sleep in America poll reveals the link between exercise and sleep quality:

→ Seventy-six percent to 83% of **exercisers** (including vigorous, moderate and light exercisers) said their sleep quality was very good or fairly good.

→ **Non-exercisers** were twice as likely as exercisers to have sleep apnea, a major risk for heart trouble.

**Then identify your sleep robbers.** Maybe it's caffeine or alcohol (especially close to bedtime) or medications, pain, indigestion or worry.

*If these steps don't help, see your health care provider.*