

# Insomnia



*There are a number of steps you can take to improve your chances of getting a good night's sleep.*

The term “insomnia” refers to having trouble sleeping. It can refer to having difficulty falling asleep, waking up during the night and not being able to fall back to sleep, or waking up too early in the morning. Occasionally, almost everyone has trouble sleeping. This is not necessarily a problem unless it makes you feel tired much of the time.

Most people need six to eight hours of sleep per night. Your requirements may vary depending upon your age, genetics, general health, lifestyle, and natural sleep-wake cycle. How you feel counts more than how many hours of sleep you've had. If you feel refreshed and rested, chances are you are getting enough sleep.

## What can cause insomnia?

Insomnia can be caused by many factors including:

- Poor sleep habits
- Depression, anxiety, or stress
- Some medical conditions, such as sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome
- Medicines (prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal)
- Substances such as caffeine, alcohol and tobacco.

## Can't sleep? What can you do?

The first and most important step is improving your sleep habits. For the next three to four weeks, try these steps to change your sleep habits and see if they work for you:

- Try to go to bed and wake up at around the same time each day, even on week-ends.
- If you cannot fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes of going to bed, get up and do something relaxing until you feel tired. Try reading a book, listening to music

or enjoying a warm bath, instead of using your computer. Try not to watch the clock.

- Avoid napping. If you must nap during the day, nap at least four hours before your bedtime and for no longer than 20 minutes.
- Reserve your bedroom for sleep and sexual intimacy, not for working, watching TV, or other activities.
- Make sure your bed and sleep clothing are comfortable—and your room is quiet and dark.
- Plan relaxing evenings and avoid stress, especially in the hour before bedtime. Try to deal with family conflict or other problems at another time.
- Avoid caffeine (especially after noon), alcohol, tobacco, and, if possible, medicines that can keep you awake.
- Drink most of your fluids in the earlier half of the day and less in the evening to avoid waking up to go to the bathroom during the night.
- Enjoy regular physical activity for 30-60 minutes at least 3 times a week, but do so at least 4-6 hours before bedtime. Regular exercise helps increase deep sleep.
- Try to skip bedtime snacks or have only a light snack one to two hours before bedtime.

## What about sleep medicines?

If changing your sleeping habits does not work for you, sleeping pills can be helpful for an occasional sleepless night, but they do not cure insomnia. In fact, long-term use of medications may do more harm than good.

- Frequent use of sleep medicines can cause some people to become dependent upon them.



- Common side effects of sleep medicines include daytime drowsiness, memory problems, and difficulty driving or doing things that require you to be alert.
- The newer prescription medicines that are widely advertised include zolpidem (Ambien, Ambien CR), eszopiclone (Lunesta), zaleplon (Sonata), and ramelteon (Rozerem). These newer medicines have not been proven to be more effective than the standard medicines used for insomnia. They have similar side effects and are much more expensive.
- The first step for treating insomnia is improving your sleep habits. If you have tried the recommendations to improve your sleep habits for three to four weeks, but you are still having difficulty sleeping, then there are several medicines which can be helpful when used now and then. These include:
  - Over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine medicines such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl, Tylenol PM, Unisom). If you have glaucoma, constipation, or an enlarged prostate (BPH), you should avoid using OTC antihistamine sleep medicines.
  - Prescription medicines such as trazodone (Desyrel) and temazepam (Restoril).

## What about herbal remedies?

Herbal medicines and supplements such as melatonin and valerian are sold over-the-counter. At the present time, not enough is known about whether these medicines are safe or work for treating insomnia. If you are taking melatonin, valerian, or any other herbal medicine, be sure to discuss this with your doctor or other health care professional.

## What if I am an older person?

Older people often need less sleep. The number of hours you may need to feel refreshed may decrease as you get older. To avoid early morning awakening, it can be especially helpful for you to skip naps and limit your fluid intake in the evening.

As an older adult, improving your sleep habits can be especially important. Older people are at higher risk of having side effects from prescription sleep medicines, especially the risk of falls.

Older people should also avoid the OTC sleep medicines like the antihistamine diphenhydramine (Benadryl, Tylenol PM, Unisom), because they may cause memory impairment, blurred vision, dizziness, dry mouth, urinary retention, and other side effects. These side effects are more common and problematic in the elderly.

If you continue to have trouble sleeping despite efforts to improve sleep habits, talk with your doctor about other options such as behavioral therapies or a low dose of a prescription sleep medicine such as trazodone or temazepam.

## When should I call Kaiser Permanente?

Be sure to call your doctor if:

- you suspect that your insomnia is caused by a medical condition or problem, such as sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, anxiety, or depression.
- you've had insomnia for one month or more and efforts to improve your sleep habits do not seem to be helping.

Not getting enough sleep can be frustrating and can leave you feeling worn out. Improving your sleep habits requires motivation and time, and it may take you several weeks before you notice improvement.

If you have questions about insomnia medicines, please speak with your Kaiser Permanente pharmacist or doctor.

For more information about getting a good night's sleep, tools and programs for relaxing or managing stress, or ways to increase and enjoy more physical activity, check these other helpful resources.

### Books

- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*
- *Say Good Night to Insomnia*, by Greg Jacobs, PhD
- *Relief from Insomnia: Getting the Sleep of your Dreams*, by Charles Morin, PhD
- *No More Sleepless Nights*, by Peter Huari, PhD, & Shirley Linde, PhD

### Web sites

- Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, message boards, health classes, and much more.
- National Sleep Foundation [sleepfoundation.org](http://sleepfoundation.org)

### Healthphone

With a *Kaiser Permanente Healthphone Directory*, you can pick messages to hear on Kaiser Permanente Healthphone (1-800-332-7563; TTY: 1-800-777-9059). Request a *Directory* from your Health Education Center or Department or download a copy at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org). (Search "Healthphone.") Listen to message #486: Insomnia.

### Health Education

Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, programs, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Herbs and supplements are sold over-the-counter. Kaiser Permanente carries only herb categories for which some evidence exists to show that the herbs may be effective to treat certain medical conditions. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.