



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



**I**nsomnia means having trouble sleeping. It can mean having a hard time falling asleep, waking up during the night and not being able to fall back to sleep, or waking up too early in the morning. Almost everyone has trouble sleeping sometimes. This is not usually a problem unless it makes you feel tired most of the time.

Most people need 6 to 8 hours of sleep each night. You may need less or more. It really depends on your age, health, lifestyle, genetics, and natural sleep-wake cycle. How you feel counts more than how many hours of sleep you've had. If you feel good and rested, chances are you are getting enough sleep.

### What can cause insomnia?

Insomnia can be caused by things like:

- Bad sleep habits
- Depression, anxiety, or stress
- Some medical conditions, like sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome
- Medicines (prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal)
- Using caffeine, alcohol and tobacco

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

Improving your sleep habits is the most important step you can take. For the next 3 to 4 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 weekends.
- If you cannot fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes of going to bed, get up and do something relaxing until you feel tired. Read a book, listen to music, or enjoy 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.
- Only use your bedroom for sleep and sex, not for working, watching TV, or other activities.
- Make sure your bed, bedding, and night clothes 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 12 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 to 60 minutes at least 3 times a week, but do so at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime. Regular exercise will help you get 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 a sleepless night from time to time, but they do not cure insomnia. In fact, long-term use of medications may do more harm than good.

- Using sleep medicines too often can cause some people to become dependent on them.

- Common side effects of sleep medicines include daytime drowsiness, memory problems, and difficulty driving or doing things for which you need to be alert.
- The newer prescription medicines that you may have seen advertised include Ambien, Ambien CR, Lunesta, Sonata, and Rozerem. These newer medicines have not been proven more effective than the others used for insomnia. They have similar side effects and some are 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 3 to 4 weeks, but you are still having a hard time sleeping, there are several medicines which can be helpful when used now and then. These include:
  - Over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine medicines such as Benadryl, Tylenol PM, Unisom. If you have glaucoma, constipation, or an enlarged prostate, you should not use these sleep medicines.
  - Prescription medicines such as Desyrel and Restoril.

## What about herbal remedies?

Herbal medicines and supplements such as melatonin and valerian are sold over-the-counter. At this time, not enough is known about whether these medicines are safe or they actually work for treating insomnia. If you are taking melatonin, valerian, or any other herbal medicine, be sure to talk to 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 waking up too early in the morning, it can be very helpful for you to skip naps and limit your fluid intake in the evening. As an older adult, improving your sleep habits can be very important. Older people are at higher risk of having side effects from prescription sleep medicines, especially because they increase the risk of falls and fractures.

Older people should also avoid nonprescription sleep medicines like Benadryl, Tylenol PM, and Unisom, because they may cause memory problems, blurred vision, dizziness, dry mouth, and other side effects. These side effects are more common and problematic in the elderly.

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

## When should I call Kaiser Permanente?

Not getting enough sleep can be frustrating and can leave you feeling worn out. Improving your sleep habits takes time. It may take you several weeks before you notice improvement. Be sure to call your doctor if:

- You think 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 it has not improved.

- 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 out 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 **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, podcasts, health classes, and much more.
- For an online program designed to help you assess and improve your sleep, visit **kphealthylifestyles.org**. To use the program, you must register for a password or **kp.org/register**.
- National Sleep Foundation **sleepfoundation.org**

Visit your Kaiser Permanente 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.