

# HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, HEALTHY SLEEP

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*There are many different sleep disorders, and almost all of them can be improved with lifestyle changes. Consistently making healthy choices can help you sleep better. These choices may involve modifying when you sleep, what you eat, and how often you exercise. Here are some tips for the most common sleep disorders.*

## Insomnia

Insomnia occurs when you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Instead of using sleeping pills, try these suggestions first:

- » Be consistent. Maintain a regular routine by waking up at the same time every morning.
- » Stop using electronic devices one hour before you go to bed. (Yes, this includes your cell phone!)
- » Keep your bedroom cool and dark.
- » Get regular exercise, but don't exercise right before bedtime.
- » Don't consume stimulants like nicotine or caffeine in the afternoon or evening.
- » Don't read, eat, or watch television in bed.
- » Try not to worry about your sleep. The more you worry about it, the harder it will be to fall asleep.

## Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) involves repetitive episodes of airway obstruction during sleep. When your airway is blocked, air is unable to get to your lungs. Your bed partner may notice that you snore loudly, gasp, make choking noises or repeatedly stop breathing during sleep.

Treatment options for sleep apnea include continuous position airway pressure (CPAP) therapy or an oral appliance that is custom-fabricated by a qualified dentist. Here are some additional lifestyle changes that can help:

- » Don't consume any alcohol near bedtime. Drinking alcohol before going to bed can make it harder to breathe during sleep. Allow at least 1 hour between your last drink and your bedtime.
- » Sleep on your side instead of on your back to help prevent your tongue and other soft tissue from blocking your airway.
- » Obtain and maintain a healthy body weight.
- » Get regular exercise.



## Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS)

Restless legs syndrome involves a strong urge to move your legs when you are resting or sitting still. You also may have a creepy-crawly, tugging, itchy or tingly sensation in your legs. This feeling is worse at night and gets better when you walk, stretch or kick. Behavioral strategies can be effective in managing the symptoms:

- » Avoid sitting still for long periods of time. Stand up and take frequent walking breaks.
- » Do stretching exercises before bed.
- » Eat a well-balanced diet including foods rich in iron.
- » Limit caffeine and alcohol and do not smoke.
- » Get some exercise every day.
- » Use heating pads on your legs when you are awake or take a warm bath to reduce symptoms.
- » Mental distraction can be helpful. Read or do other relaxing activities to avoid thinking about your legs.

## Excessive Sleepiness (Narcolepsy, Idiopathic Hypersomnia)

Narcolepsy and idiopathic hypersomnia are similar conditions that cause intense daytime sleepiness. These conditions are frequently treated with medications. Other changes also can improve your quality of life:

- » Adults should sleep at least 7 hours per night. Teens should sleep at least 8 hours nightly.
- » Schedule a brief afternoon nap lasting 15 to 20 minutes.
- » Eat a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet to reduce sleepiness after meals.
- » Don't drink alcohol.

- » Avoid prescription drugs that list sleepiness as a side effect.
- » Ask your doctor for help in managing school and work schedules.

## Parasomnias

Parasomnias are undesirable events or experiences that happen when falling asleep, sleeping, or waking up. Examples include sleepwalking, nightmare disorder and sleep-related eating disorder. Some parasomnias can cause physical injuries. Sleep deprivation and other sleep disorders such as sleep apnea can increase your risk of parasomnias. Follow these tips to reduce your risk:

- » Adults should sleep 7 hours or more per night.
- » Maintain a consistent sleep schedule.
- » Silence your phone and any other electronic device that could disrupt your sleep.
- » Reduce stress through relaxation techniques such as meditation.
- » Talk to your doctor about the side effects of any medications that you take.
- » Talk to your doctor about your risk for other sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea.



## Circadian Rhythm Sleep-Wake Disorders

Circadian rhythm disorders involve problems with the timing of sleep. For example you may feel sleepy much earlier or later than most people. Common circadian rhythm disorders include shift work disorder and jet lag.

### Shift Work Disorder

Shift work disorder occurs when you have insomnia or excessive sleepiness due to work hours that take place at least in part during the night. It also can occur due to rotating or extremely long work hours. There are some ways to adjust to shift work:

- » If possible, plan to take a nap during a break in your shift or before reporting for a night shift.
- » Try to keep the same schedule on work days and days off.
- » Exposure to bright light on the job can improve alertness during night shift work.
- » To shift your sleep period later, expose yourself to bright light at your old bedtime.
- » To shift your sleep period earlier, avoid light at night and seek bright light first thing in the morning.

- » If you work rotating shifts, ask your manager to schedule a natural, “clockwise” rotation. This means that your new shift will have a start time that is later than your last shift.
- » If you must sleep during the day, try to keep the room as dark, cool, and quiet as possible.
- » Sleep first, and then exercise after waking up.

## Jet Lag

Jet lag happens when you travel across multiple time zones and have trouble adjusting to the new schedule. It is a temporary condition. To reduce jet lag:

- » Start gradually adjusting to the new time zone’s schedule a few days before the trip.
- » After you reach your destination, try to spend time outside during the day. Sunlight will help you adjust to the new time zone.
- » Avoid caffeine and alcohol, which can make jet lag worse.

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