

What does sleeping well mean?

Sleeping well means getting enough sleep for your body, but how much sleep is enough varies among people.

The number of hours you sleep is not as important as how you feel when you wake up. If you do not feel refreshed, you probably need more sleep. Another sign of not getting enough sleep is feeling tired during the day.

The average total nightly sleep time is 7½ to 8 hours. Healthy adults may need a little more or a little less than this.

Why is getting enough sleep important?

Getting enough quality sleep is a basic part of good health. When your sleep suffers, your mood and your thoughts can suffer too. You may find yourself feeling more grumpy or stressed. Not getting enough sleep also can lead to serious problems, including injury, anxiety and depression.

What might cause poor sleeping?

Many things can cause sleep problems, including:

- Stress. Stress can be caused by fear about a single event. You can also experience stress through everyday events, such as work or school.
- Depression, anxiety and other mental or emotional conditions.
- Changes in your sleep habits or surroundings. This includes changes that happen where you sleep, such as noise, light or sleeping in a different bed. It also includes changes in your sleep pattern, such as having jet lag or working a late shift.
- Health problems. Examples of some health problems are pain, breathing problems or restless legs syndrome.
- Lack of regular exercise.

How can you help yourself?

Here are some tips that may help you sleep more soundly and wake up feeling more refreshed.

Your sleeping area

- Use your bedroom only for sleeping and sex. A bit of light reading may help you fall asleep. If it doesn't, do your reading elsewhere in the house. Don't watch TV in bed.

- Be sure your bed is big enough to stretch out comfortably, especially if you have a sleep partner.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and cool. Use curtains, blinds or a sleep mask to block out light. To block out noise, use earplugs, soothing music or a "white noise" machine.

Your evening and bedtime routine

- Create a relaxing bedtime routine. You might want to take a warm shower or bath, listen to soothing music or drink a cup of non-caffeinated tea.
- Go to bed at the same time every night, and get up at the same time every morning, even if you feel tired.

What to avoid

- Limit caffeine (coffee, tea, caffeinated sodas) during the day, and don't have any for at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.
- Don't drink alcohol before bedtime. Alcohol can cause you to wake up more often during the night.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco, especially in the evening. Nicotine can keep you awake.
- Don't take naps during the day, especially close to bedtime.
- Don't lie in bed awake for too long. If you can't fall asleep, or if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep within 15 minutes or so, get out of bed and go to another room until you feel sleepy.
- Don't take medicine right before bed that may keep you awake or make you feel hyper or energized. Your doctor can tell you if your medicine may do this and if you can take it earlier in the day.

If you can't sleep

- Imagine yourself in a peaceful, pleasant scene. Focus on the details and feelings of being in a place that is relaxing.
- Get up and do a quiet or boring activity until you feel sleepy.
- Don't drink any liquids after 6 p.m. if you wake up often because you have to go to the washroom.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.

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