

Do You Lay in Bed For Hours and Can't Sleep? How to Get Your Best Sleep Ever

Nothing is worse than having trouble falling asleep. Tossing and turning, watching the hours tick by, knowing that you have a busy day ahead of you. But you don't have to suffer through it alone! I've been there many times, and have learned a ton on my own journey to managing my sleep issues and getting good quality sleep.

This article will cover the most common sleep disorders and what you can do in both the short term and long term to address your sleep problems and get a better night's rest.



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Common Sleep Disorders and Symptoms:

If you are constantly experiencing daytime sleepiness, and struggling with attention, memory, or general functioning, it's possible that you could be struggling with a sleep disorder. Researchers estimate that [50 to 70 million Americans](#) suffer from a chronic sleep disorder. This section will cover four of the most common sleep disorders and symptoms.

(The following information is sourced from the [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention](#))

Restless Legs Syndrome:

- Can be described as intense creeping, prickling, or painful sensations often in the lower legs that are relieved by moving your legs (often worse at night and when lying down)

Insomnia:

- Chronic difficulty falling and/or staying asleep (can include waking up too early in the morning)

Sleep Apnea:

- People with sleep apnea momentarily stop breathing in their sleep (may cause a gasping or choking sound) which also briefly interrupts their sleep

Narcolepsy:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness combined with sudden muscle weakness that often looks like episodes of uncontrollable “sleep attacks”

What to Do If You Think You May Have a Sleep Disorder:

Untreated sleep disorders can cause or worsen other physical and mental health conditions, so it's crucial to get the appropriate treatment from a healthcare provider.

- **Visit your doctor** to discuss your sleep issues, address any other medical conditions affecting your sleep, and make a treatment plan to address your sleep problems. This could include behavioral changes, medication, supplements, and/or therapy.
- Your doctor may give you a **referral to a sleep clinic** for a sleep study (called a polysomnogram) which can identify sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, and insomnia.
- **Therapy can teach you good “sleep hygiene”** (habits and routines to promote better sleep health), relaxation and stress-reduction techniques.

What to Do When You Can't Get to Sleep

In The Moment:

- **Reduce any distractions** (noise, light, comfortable temperature, comfortable pillow, etc.)
- **Get out of bed and move to another space** to do a calm activity like reading, gentle stretching, or deep breathing

- If there is something specific on your mind, **jot down your thoughts** instead of ruminating on them
- **Have a glass of water or herbal tea**
- **Distract yourself** from stressing about not getting enough sleep
- **Go back to bed *only* when you feel sleepy**

15 Long-Term Strategies for Better Sleep

While sleep is a natural process, there are many changes we can make to our habits and routines to make it easier to get a good night's rest.

I highly recommend checking out the book [Quiet Your Mind and Get to Sleep](#) by Colleen E. Carney (Ph.D.) and Rachel Manber (Ph.D.). They use Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques, which have been shown to be as effective as sleep medications with more long-term relief from insomnia.

In the following section, we will briefly go over some of the strategies suggested in the book.

1. **Develop a relaxing wind-down routine:** Brush your teeth, wash your face, and choose a calming activity like reading, listening to an audiobook or podcast
2. **No screens at least 1 hour before bed:** The blue light from our cellphones, tablets, and other devices can trick our brains into thinking that it is daytime.
3. **A cozy sleep environment:** Make sure you have a comfortable pillow, temperature, quiet (or white noise if you prefer), blackout curtains or a sleep mask to block out any light
4. **Keep your clock out of sight:** Constantly checking the time only worsens anxiety about not sleeping. Keep your clock and/or cell phone out of sight.
5. **Limit caffeine and alcohol,** especially in the evening
6. **Stay hydrated throughout the day** so that you won't wake up thirsty throughout the night
7. **Exercise, but not too close to bedtime** as it can keep us awake
8. **Don't eat right before bed** (especially heavy or spicy foods), instead have an evening snack

9. **Manage stress:** Make time for hobbies and relaxation time, and **get support if you are struggling** to manage on your own.
10. **Use a journal or planner** to jot down your thoughts, tasks, and plans so that you don't stay awake at night stressing about them
11. **Having the same bedtime and wake-up time every day** trains our bodies to know when is time to sleep and when is time to be awake.
12. **Don't nap!** Napping messes with our sleep schedule and causes more problems in the long run. Try to stay awake until close to your usual bedtime. If you must take a nap, limit it to 20 minutes.
13. **Treat any medical conditions** that may be impacting your sleep (ex. A CPAP for sleep apnea, heartburn medication, pregnancy pillow, etc.)
14. **Keep a sleep diary** to help you to identify patterns in your sleep and your individual sleep issues.
15. **Get some bright light first thing in the morning.** This helps to regulate our circadian rhythm. If you live in a darker climate, you may want to consider investing in a light therapy lamp (sometimes called a SAD lamp)

Final Thoughts:

Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep can take a huge toll on your well-being. Rest assured that there are tons of steps you can take to ensure that you get a better night's sleep. Some small changes in your daily habits and routines can make a significant impact on the quality of your sleep.

As always, make sure to check in with your healthcare provider if you think you may have any symptoms of the common sleep disorders listed above, or to address any other health issues that could be affecting your quality of sleep.