



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

Insomnia 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 causes regular fatigue.

Chronic insomnia can lead to serious health conditions and affect your physical, mental, and emotional health. 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 many things such as:

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

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 your sleep improves:

- 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. Avoid using your computer or watching TV. Try not to watch the clock.
- Avoid napping. If you must nap during the day, nap at least 4 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 set aside time to

deal with family conflict or other problems earlier in the day.

- 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 at least 30 minutes 5 or more times a week, but do so at least 3 hours before bedtime. Regular exercise will help you get deep sleep.
- Try to skip bedtime snacks or have only a light snack 1 to 2 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid using a computer, smartphone, or tablet in the last 1 to 2 hours before bedtime. Being exposed to the light from these screens can affect your ability to fall asleep.

What about sleep medicines?

The first step for treating insomnia is improving your sleep habits. If you have tried the recommendations listed above for 3 to 4 weeks, but you are still having a hard time sleeping, you may want to try a sleep medication.

There are several medications to consider. You should be aware that although these medicines can be helpful when used now and then, they do not cure insomnia. These include:

- Over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine medicines such as Benadryl, Tylenol PM, and Unisom. If you have glaucoma, constipation, or an enlarged prostate, you should not use these sleep medicines.

- Prescription medicines such as Desyrel and Restoril.

Other prescription medications that are newer on the market 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.

When it comes to sleep medications, keep in mind the following:

- Using sleep medicines too often can cause some people to become dependent on them. In fact, long-term use of medications may do more harm than good.
- Common side effects of sleep medications include daytime drowsiness, memory problems, and difficulty driving or doing things for which you need to be alert.

What about herbal remedies?

Herbal medicines and supplements such as melatonin and valerian are sold over-the-counter. Studies have not shown that these products can improve sleep. If you are taking these or any other herbal medicine, be sure to tell your doctor or other health care professional what you take.

Seniors: How does age affect sleep?

The number of sleep hours needed to feel refreshed often decreases with age. If you are a senior, you may need less sleep than you used to. To avoid waking up too early in the morning, it can be helpful to skip naps and limit fluid intake in the evening.

Older people often experience more severe side effects from sleep medications. People over age 65 should 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.

The side effects of prescription medications can also be more severe in older people. Medications called benzodiazepines, like Xanax, Valium, and Ativan, are not recommended for treating insomnia in people over age 65. They may cause memory problems and increase the risk of falls and accidents. They can be habit-forming and must be tapered off slowly, never stopped abruptly.

Talk with your doctor if you have concerns about taking these or other medications.

When should I call Kaiser Permanente?

If you continue to have trouble sleeping, talk with your doctor about other options such as behavioral therapies or medication.

Insomnia can be frustrating and can leave you feeling anxious, depressed, and fatigued. 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.

Other resources

Books

- *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

Websites

- Connect to our website at kpdoc.org/sleep to learn more about sleeping well.
- For an online program designed to help you assess and improve your sleep, visit kphealthylifestyles.org.
- National Sleep Foundation sleepfoundation.org

Visit your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, programs, and additional resources.

Some health concerns, including insomnia, can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are being hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

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 the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.