

I Can't Sleep!

Another sleepless night. You toss and turn, trying to banish worries about your family or your job. You fret about tomorrow. Sleep just doesn't come.

Insomnia - having trouble falling asleep, having trouble getting back to sleep and waking up too early - is common.

Our brain makes mood-enhancing hormones while we're sleeping, and if we get too little sleep, it won't make and store enough for the next day. That leads to poor concentration, irritability, anxiety, depression, low energy, even weight gain.

Research has found that sleep problems can lead to depression, and depression can lead to sleep problems. Lack of sleep can trigger mania or hypomania in people with bipolar disorder.

Sleep aids and natural remedies

Prescription drugs, such as Ambien (zolpidem) and Lunesta (eszopiclone), can help promote sleep. But, they may cause next-day grogginess and are potentially addictive. Ask your doctor if these are right for you.

Non-prescription, "over-the-counter" sleep aids can help, but may be less effective than prescription drugs and can have side effects. Talk to your doctor.

Natural remedies used to promote sleep include: valerian, hops, melatonin, lavender, essential oils of ylang ylang, chamomile, eucalyptus, lemongrass and rose. Herbal products and nutritional supplements are not tested as extensively as drugs. Talk to your health care provider about their use.

Self-help tips

- Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Don't exercise within two hours of bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine in the evening. Coffee, chocolate, soft drinks, non-herbal teas and "energy-boosters" contain caffeine.
- Avoid large meals and spicy foods within two hours of bedtime.
- Eat a bedtime snack high in sleep-inducing tryptophan, such as milk, turkey or walnuts.
- Don't nap after 3 p.m.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet room with a comfortable temperature (60-65 degrees is best).
- Wind down just before bedtime with a warm bath, soft music, meditation or reading.
- Increase your exposure to sunshine or very bright lights in the morning and dim the lights an hour before bedtime to reset your body's biological clock.
- Some antidepressants cause insomnia, so if you're taking them, talk to your doctor.
- Try using earplugs, a white noise machine or a humming fan to block out disruptive sounds.
- Don't lie in bed awake if you can't get to sleep. Read, watch television, or listen to music, until you feel tired.
- See a doctor if your sleeping problems continue.