



Sleep right Sleep tight

Natural sleep before medicines

Sleep patterns often change as we get older. Sleep may be lighter and you may wake up more often.

But it's the *quality* of your sleep, not just the quantity that is important. Some people who sleep for a short time (4 to 5 hours) may not complain of sleep problems, while others who sleep for a long time (9 hours or more) may still feel tired if they haven't slept well.

Sleeping problems are common. Insomnia is the medical term for having trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep or having sleep that doesn't leave you feeling rested. If you have trouble falling or staying asleep three times or more per week, talk to your doctor.

Effects of sleep problems

Being tired can make basic activities more difficult and affect the way you think and feel. You may become more anxious, irritable and get angry more easily. Poor sleep can also lead to depression and an increased risk of falls.

Causes of sleep problems

There are many causes of sleep problems and stress is a common factor. If you think stress may be affecting your sleep discuss your concerns with your doctor, family or friends and try relaxation techniques. Other things that can affect your sleep are substances that keep your body active (e.g. food or drinks that contain caffeine or alcohol), your lifestyle (e.g. exercising or eating too close to bedtime), and some medical conditions or medicines.

Managing sleep problems

If you are having trouble sleeping, keep a sleep diary for 1–2 weeks. Use it to record your sleep and waking patterns, and then discuss this with you doctor.

Your doctor may also suggest other ways to manage your sleep problems. Cognitive therapy can help change the way you think about sleep. Stimulus control involves only going to bed when you're sleepy, and sleep restriction focuses on limiting the time you spend in bed to the actual amount of time you sleep. Learning relaxation techniques may help you unwind before going to bed. Some people may also be referred to another health professional (e.g. psychologist) or sleep disorders clinic.

How well do you sleep?

Take our *Sleep quiz*
www.nps.org.au/sleep

Tips to get a good night's sleep

- Wake up at the same time each day, even after a poor night's sleep.
- Be as active as possible during the day and spend time outdoors.
- Reduce the amount of caffeine you have each day. Avoid caffeine-containing drinks after lunchtime (e.g. cola, tea, coffee, cocoa, energy drinks).
- Avoid naps during the day. If you do nap, keep it to 20 minutes and before 3 pm.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol in the evening.
- Avoid heavy meals, exercise or working on the computer late in the evening.
- Relax for 30 minutes before going to bed. Try a warm bath.
- Don't eat, work, watch television, read or discuss problems in bed.
- Ensure you're comfortable and that your bed is in a quiet, dark environment.
- If you're too hot or cold in bed it will be harder to sleep — try and keep cool or warm.
- Don't stay in bed if you are awake for more than 20 minutes, go to another room and do something relaxing.

Good sleep habits may take some time to develop. Keep practising these tips to get the most from your sleep.



Sleeping pills

Sleeping pills, like **all medicines, have risks and benefits**. Medicines may help you fall asleep but you won't sleep as deeply.

Medicines — including herbs and other natural remedies — should only be used for a short time. If you use medicines for a long time your sleep problems may become worse or you may become dependent on pills to sleep. Long-term use can also increase the risk of accidents and falls.

The sleep cycle

Stage 5 is a period of 'deep sleep'. If you don't reach this stage, or stay in it for long enough, you won't feel rested in the morning.

Sleep dos and don'ts

Do: Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medicine, including vitamins, herbs and other remedies. Some medicines can actually cause sleep problems.

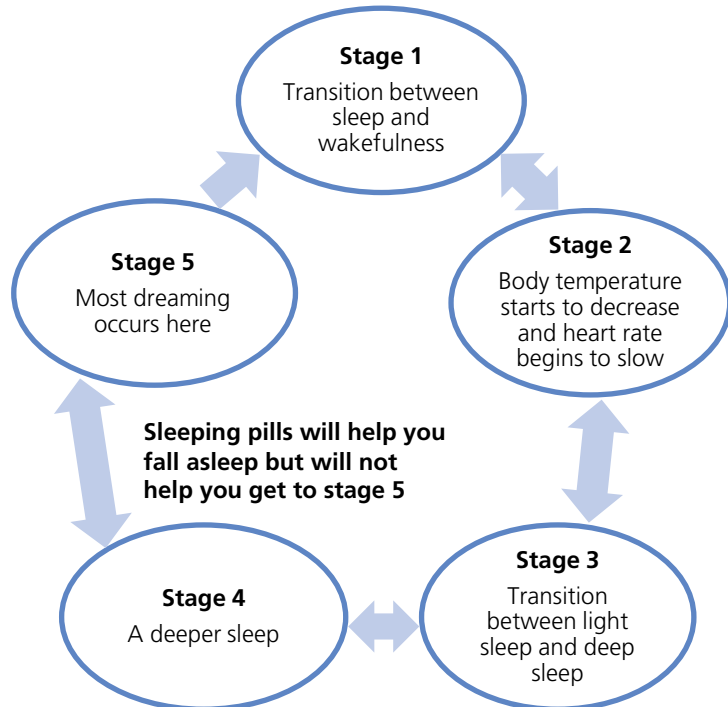
Do: Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you stop taking sleeping pills. Stopping them quickly can make sleeping problems worse.

Do: Check if any of your medicines need to be taken with or without food. Remember some interact with alcohol.

Do: Always read and follow the medicines information on the packet. Your doctor or pharmacist can give you a consumer medicine information leaflet which lists any side effects and interactions.

Do: If you're having trouble sleeping, keep a sleep diary for 1–2 weeks. This will help you keep track of your sleep patterns and any activities that may be causing problems. Take the diary with you when you see your doctor. **Order a sleep diary from www.nps.org.au/sleep.**

Don't: Don't share sleeping pills. The right medicine for you may not be the best one for someone else and could cause harm.



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