

## How to feel rested and get a good night's sleep



### Exhausted?

### Tossing and turning?

### Not getting a good night's sleep?

Although sleep problems are common, there are some easy ways to improve the quality of your sleep.

Many people find their physical and mental well-being also improves when their sleep improves.

It's hard to say how much sleep is ideal.

Each person is different and some people need more sleep than others. Kids and teenagers need more sleep than adults. Older adults tend to take longer to fall asleep and wake more frequently during the night than younger adults. Most adults and kids would sleep 10 to 12 hours a night without clocks or routines. Although the average Canadian gets around 8 hours of sleep each night, one in seven people get less than 6.5 hours of sleep each night. Almost half of us cut back on our sleep as a way of getting the most out of our days.

We also know that problems getting to sleep, staying asleep, or feeling rested after sleep are surprisingly common. One in four people experience regular sleep problems. We are more likely to have sleep difficulties when we are experiencing stress, major life changes, health problems or substance use problems. Difficulties in our sleep can then make these problems even worse.

### What kinds of sleep problems can people have?

- **Trouble falling asleep**  
lying in bed for more than 30 minutes without being able to fall asleep
- **Trouble staying asleep**  
waking up frequently during the night
- **Early morning waking**  
waking in the early hours of the morning before you need to get up but not being able to fall back asleep
- **Excessive sleepiness or urge to nap during the day**
- **Excessive fatigue or lack of energy**
- **Behaviours that interfere with sleep**  
such as snoring, teeth-grinding, restless legs, sleep walking, and trouble breathing
- **Sleeping too much or for too long**

# Tips for Getting a Good Night Sleep

One of the most powerful ways to improve sleep is to make small changes in everyday behaviours that impact how fast we fall asleep and whether we stay asleep. The goal is to increase the behaviours that improve sleep while we reduce the behaviours that are interfering with sleep.

## TIP #1:

### Avoid caffeine at least two hours before bedtime

Research shows that some people have problems sleeping when they have consumed too much caffeine. This is especially true as we get older. Coffee, some teas, iced tea, colas and soft drinks are the main source of caffeine for most people. Certain medications for colds, allergies, pain relief, and appetite suppression also contain caffeine.

## TIP #2:

### Avoid alcohol at least two hours before bedtime

It might feel like drinking alcohol helps with falling asleep, but alcohol can interfere with staying asleep later in the night. Drinking alcohol before bedtime can also disrupt sleep by causing breathing problems and jerky arms and legs. People with alcohol problems often have chronic sleep problems.

If you are having problems reducing your use of alcohol, visit [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca) or [www.silink.ca](http://www.silink.ca) for more information and helpful resources.

## How do sleep problems affect mental health?

Sleep problems can have a negative effect on our mental health by influencing our emotions, thoughts, behaviours and body sensations.

**Emotions:** If your sleep is disturbed, you might feel irritable, grumpy, numbed out, sad, anxious, worried, or stressed.

**Thoughts:** Sleep problems can make it difficult to concentrate, think clearly, or make decisions the next day.

**Behaviours:** We are more likely to avoid our usual activities when we are experiencing sleep problems.

**Body sensations:** Sleep difficulties can leave us feeling tired, drowsy or worn out.

Although sleep problems are common, there are some easy ways to improve the quality of your sleep. Many people find their physical and mental well-being also improves when their sleep improves.

## TIP #3:

### Don't smoke at least two hours before bedtime

People who smoke are more likely to have problems falling asleep, staying asleep, and nightmares. Getting a good night's sleep might be another good reason to reduce or quit smoking. Smokers can reduce their sleep problems by avoiding cigarettes at least two hours before bedtime.

If you are interested in reducing or quitting smoking, visit [www.silink.ca](http://www.silink.ca) for more information.

## TIP #4:

### Exercise at least two hours before bedtime

Research shows that people who exercise regularly (30 to 60 minutes three times a week) have deeper sleep. Exercising four to eight hours before bedtime can be helpful but exercising one or two hours before bedtime can interfere with falling asleep.

Your local community centre is a great source of information about recreation and leisure options close to home.



For more information about how emotions, thoughts, behaviours and body sensations influence our mental health, see our wellness modules at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca).

## Should I use sleeping pills?

We recommend trying these tips BEFORE taking over-the-counter or prescription sleeping pills. Some sleep medications are addictive and can have side effects that actually interfere with falling asleep the next day.

### TIP #5:

#### Follow the same routine

Try to keep the same sleep and wake schedule every day—including weekends. People who get up and go to bed at different times each day are more likely to have sleep problems. For example, people who are rotating shift workers often have sleep problems because of regular changes in their sleep and wake schedules.

### TIP #6:

#### Avoid taking naps if you are experiencing sleep problems

Some of us can enjoy our naps and still get a good night's sleep. Unfortunately, some of us will experience problems falling asleep or staying asleep at night if we take naps during the day. If you do take a nap, try to keep them to 30 minutes or less. Cut out naps completely if you are experiencing sleep problems.

### TIP #7:

#### Avoid being hungry or eating heavily before going to bed

Eating balanced, healthy meals and snacks at regular intervals throughout the day will help with a good night's sleep. Try to avoid eating a large meal in the two hours before bedtime. Consider a light, healthy snack if you are still hungry just before going to bed.

### TIP #8:

#### Get up if you do not fall asleep within half an hour

Leave your bedroom and do something relaxing like listening to soft music, taking a bath, drinking a warm caffeine-free beverage or meditating. Go back to bed once you feel very drowsy. Don't try too hard to fall asleep as this never works. Get up if you don't fall asleep within 30 minutes. At first, this strategy might feel like it is making things worse as you will have a few sleepless nights. However, after several nights, it will become easier to fall asleep and stay asleep. Be consistent in your use of this strategy as studies show it is very effective in reversing sleep problems.

### TIP #9:

#### Make your bedroom comfortable and only use for sleeping

A mattress with good support and comfortable bedding are both helpful. Make sure your room is not too hot or too cold. Do not use your bed for watching TV, work, studying or any other mentally stimulating activities—especially if you are already experiencing sleep problems.

### TIP #10:

#### Challenge the belief we can't function without a perfect night's sleep

When we can't sleep, it's normal to check the clock and worry about getting through the upcoming day. Unfortunately, this increases anxiety and it's even harder to fall back asleep. Turn the clock away from your view. Remind yourself that most of the time you can still do your daily activities even when feeling tired (unless this would pose a danger to yourself or others).

For additional tips on managing difficult thoughts that can disturb sleep, see our **Healthy Thinking** Wellness Module at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca).

To improve the quality of your sleep, follow these strategies on as many days as you can.

- Use our sleep skills diary available at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca) to track your progress.
- Be consistent in your use of the strategies.
- Remind yourself it takes time to change sleep behaviours and see positive results.



# Still having sleep problems?

If you continue to experience difficulties with your sleeping patterns, schedule a visit with your physician or trained health professional. Sometimes sleep problems can be a symptom of a sleep disorder, mental illness or substance use problem that requires treatment. Inappropriate dosages or timing of medications can lead to problems falling sleeping or excessive drowsiness. Other types of health treatments can also lead to sleep difficulties. Quality of sleep often improves once these types of problems are identified and better managed.

For more information about sleep disorders, visit the National Sleep Foundation website at [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

Track your practice of good sleep habits.  
Use our online **Sleep Skills Diary** at  
[www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

## Select sources and additional resources

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- National Sleep Foundation online library: brochures, sleep diaries and more. [www.sleepfoundation.org/sleeplibrary/index.php?secid=6](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleeplibrary/index.php?secid=6)
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