

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 that their physical and mental well-being also improves when their sleep improves.

## 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
- **Behaviours that interfere with sleep:** such as snoring, grinding your teeth, restless legs, sleep walking and breathing problems
- **Sleeping too much or for too long**
- **Excessive sleepiness or urge to nap during the day**
- **Excessive fatigue or lack of energy**

## How much sleep do I really need?

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends the following sleep times:

- **Toddlers:** 11-14 hours a night
- **Preschoolers:** 10-13 hours a night
- **School-aged children:** 9-11 hours a night
- **Teens:** 8-10 hours a night
- **Adults:** 7-9 hours a night
- **Older adults:** 7-8 hours a night<sup>1</sup>

Of course, different people have different needs. Some people naturally need less sleep or more sleep. However, for adults, consistently sleeping fewer than six hours a night or consistently sleeping for ten or more hours a night can have health risks or may be a sign of another health problem.

About two-thirds of Canadians say that they get at least seven hours of sleep most nights, but about half of adults report sleep problems at least some of the time. Only about 40% of adults report that they feel refreshed after sleep most of the time.<sup>2</sup>

# tips for getting a good night's sleep

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



## Tip #1 Avoid caffeine close to bedtime

Some people have problems sleeping when they have consumed too much caffeine. This is especially true as you get older. Coffee, tea, soft drinks and chocolate are the main source of caffeine for most people. Some medications for colds, allergies, pain relief and appetite suppression also contain caffeine.

## Tip #2 Avoid alcohol close to bedtime

It might feel like drinking alcohol helps you fall asleep faster, but alcohol can disrupt your sleep. Drinking alcohol before bedtime can also cause 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.cisur.ca](http://www.cisur.ca) for more information and helpful resources.

## Tip #3 Unwind

Stress has a big impact on sleep, so it's important to take time to relax before bed. Read a good book, do crosswords or Sudoku, take a bath or shower, listen to calming music or try a relaxation exercise. Screen time is stimulating and the blue light emitted by devices can affect sleep, so it's best to avoid watching TV, going online or using other electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bed.

## Tip #4 Exercise a few hours before bedtime

Research shows that people who exercise regularly (30 to 60 minutes, three times a week) have deeper sleep. Exercising gives you a boost of energy, so it's best to exercise four to eight hours before bedtime.

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

## Tip #5 Follow the same routine

Try to keep the same sleep and wake schedule every day—including weekends. Keeping a consistent schedule helps your body get into a routine. People who get up and go to bed at different times each day are more likely to have sleep problems.



## How do sleep problems affect mental health?

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

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

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

**Behaviours:** You're more likely to avoid your usual activities when you are experiencing sleep problems.

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



# should I use sleeping pills?

We recommend trying these tips before taking over-the-counter or prescription sleeping pills. Some disrupt the way you sleep or interfere with falling asleep the next day. Certain medications may be addictive. Beliefs around medication can also play a huge role in sleep. If you believe that you need medication to sleep, you're less likely to sleep well without medication, whether you really need it or not. If you feel like you need to take sleeping medication often, it's best to talk to your doctor.

## Tip #6 Avoid naps if you experience sleep problems

Naps aren't necessarily a problem, but for some, naps may interfere with sleep at night. If you experience problems with sleep, consider cutting out naps to see if your sleep improves. In all cases, it's best to keep naps short, around 30 minutes at most, to minimize disruptions to your normal sleep patterns. If you often feel so tired that you can't get through the day without a nap, it's a good idea to talk to a doctor. It can be a sign of another health problem, including a sleep disorder.

## Tip #7 Avoid going to bed too hungry or too full

Eating balanced, healthy meals and snacks at regular times 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're still hungry just before going to bed.

## Tip #8 Get up if you do not fall asleep within half an hour

Get up if you don't fall asleep within 30 minutes. Leave your bedroom and do something relaxing like listening to soft music, taking a bath, drinking a warm caffeine-free beverage or meditating. Avoid watching TV or going on a screen during this time. Go back to bed once you feel very drowsy. Don't try too hard to fall asleep—this usually doesn't work. At first, this strategy might feel like it's making things worse because you may 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. Studies show it is very effective in reversing sleep problems.

## Tip #9 Make your bedroom comfortable and only use it for sleeping

A mattress with good support and comfortable bedding are both helpful. Make sure your room is not too hot or too cold—slightly cool is best. Don't use your bed for watching TV, working, studying or any other mentally stimulating activities, especially if you are already experiencing sleep problems.<sup>3</sup>

## Tip #10 Challenge the belief you can't function without a perfect night's sleep

When you can't sleep, you might check the clock and worry about getting through the upcoming day. This increases anxiety and makes it even harder to fall back asleep. Turn the clock away from your view. Remind yourself that you can likely do your daily activities even when you feel tired (unless this would pose a danger to yourself or others).

For more 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 that it takes time to change sleep behaviours and see positive results.

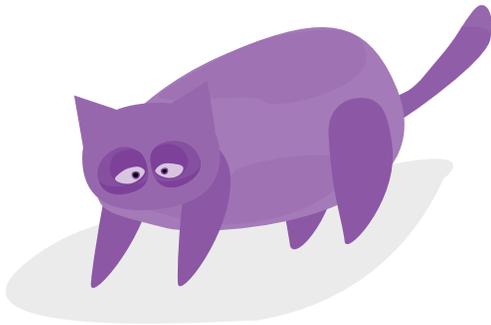


## still having sleep problems?

If you continue to experience difficulties with your sleeping patterns, talk to your doctor or mental health professional. Sleep problems can be a sign of a sleep disorder, mental illness, substance use problem, or other health problem. Health problems like asthma and chronic pain can also affect the way you sleep. The quality of your sleep often improves once these illnesses or conditions are identified and managed.

Some medications may cause sleep problems. Talk to your doctor if you think that your medication is affecting your sleep.

For more information about sleep disorders, visit the Canadian Sleep Society at [www.css-scs.ca](http://www.css-scs.ca).



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# T!P

**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

- Visit the Canadian Sleep Society at [css-scs.ca](http://css-scs.ca). Here you will find an extensive resource section with suggested books, podcasts, and other publications.
- Visit the US National Sleep Foundation at [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org).
- Kryger, M. (2004). *Can't Sleep, Can't Stay Awake*. Toronto: Harper Collins.
- Visit Anxiety Canada's website for breathing and muscle relaxation techniques—<https://anxietycanada.com/articles/getting-a-good-nights-sleep/>

### Endnotes

- 1 Hirshkowitz, Max et al. (2015). National Sleep Foundation's sleep time duration recommendations: methodology and results summary. *Sleep Health*, 1(1), 40-43.
- 2 Statistics Canada. (2017). Duration and quality of sleep among Canadians aged 18 to 79. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2017009/article/54857-eng.htm>
- 3 The Sleep Council. Perfect Sleep Environment. <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/perfect-sleep-environment/>