



Determining the Cause of Your Sleep Problem

The time I go to sleep (or the time I get up) regularly changes by more than an hour: Example--sometimes I fall asleep at 9 pm, sometimes 10:30 pm

Working on a regular sleep schedule will help. And don't lie in bed after you wake up--this disrupts your sleep-wake rhythm

It takes more than an hour to fall asleep

Working on stress management and relaxation techniques can help. You might have delayed sleep syndrome (be a night owl who goes to bed later and later)--work on this by trying to get up at the same time each morning, as waking later and later tends to cause more sleep problems in the long run.

It takes a long time to fall back asleep when I wake up in the middle of the night

Many people wake up a lot at night (even up to 15 times); what matters is how long it takes to fall back asleep. If it takes too long, it could be caused by worrying too much, or you might be spending more time in bed than you need. If you are worrying, take a look at our Worry, Mindfulness, and Realistic Thinking Tip Sheets

I sleep fewer than 7 hours a night

If so, you most likely aren't getting enough sleep.

I feel sleepy during the day

You might not be getting enough sleep, or you might have a medical condition like hypothyroidism or a sleep disorder such as sleep apnea. If you have recently started or stopped taking a medication, this could be the cause as well.

I take naps

Try cutting back on them for a week and see if that helps. Taking naps, in the long run, probably makes many sleep problems worse.

I work shifts

Give yourself time to wind down after your shift, and try to keep a non-interrupted sleep time. Keep your room soundproof and dark. If your shift rotates, prepare for it on your days off.

I wake up earlier than I want to and have trouble going back to sleep

You could be going to bed too early, or you could be depressed. You may also have an advanced sleep phase (be a "night owl"); in this case, having regular awake time in the morning is important; sleeping in later and later causes more sleep problems.

My sleeping problems started when I experienced a stressful life event

Working on managing that stress can help (see our Stress Management Tip Sheet for ideas). Often, however, sleep problems begin to take on a life of their own even if they are caused by stress.

I kick my legs when I sleep

You may have periodic leg movements or restless legs syndrome. Evaluation at a sleep disorders clinic is necessary: There are effective treatment options that include medication and other strategies.

I am a heavy snorer

You may have sleep apnea; over 75% of people with sleep apnea are not diagnosed with it. Even children can have sleep apnea, sometimes caused by enlarged tonsils or adenoids. You need to see a specialist at a sleep disorders center for a sleep evaluation ("sleep study"); Once diagnosed there are many treatment options.

I have nightmares, walk in my sleep, or clench/grind my teeth

You may have parasomnias. Tooth grinding is often discovered by a dentist, who can help with potential solutions. Adults with nightmares tend to be best helped by therapists; often depression or anxiety is the cause. Sleep walking in adults requires medical evaluation.