

# Common Sleep Problems

Sleep problems involve having a hard time falling asleep, staying asleep or staying awake. Check (✓) if any of these statements apply to you:

- I often do not get enough sleep.
- I do not have restful sleep.
- I have trouble staying awake when I sit still, watch television or read.
- I fall asleep or feel very tired while driving.
- I have problems concentrating at home, work or school.
- I have had problems doing my work at my job or school.
- I am often told by others that I look tired.
- I have trouble controlling my emotions.
- I feel like I am slow to react or respond.
- I feel like I have to take a nap almost every day.

If you checked any of the statements, you may have a sleep problem.

## Causes of Sleep Problems

Sleep problems can happen for many reasons, but some of the more common causes are:

- Changes to your sleep-wake cycle, such as working night shift when you usually sleep
- Not getting enough sleep to feel rested and alert through the day
- Health problems such as asthma, heart failure, or pain and certain medicines
- Alcohol, caffeine or nicotine use
- Sleep disorders

## Common Types of Sleep Disorders

### Insomnia

Insomnia includes any problem with falling asleep, staying asleep or waking up too early in the morning. Factors that may cause insomnia include:

- Illness
- Feeling sad
- Stress
- Caffeine
- Alcohol or drugs
- Certain medicines
- Heavy smoking

- Poor sleep habits such as:
  - Daytime napping
  - Sleeping in a place with a lot of noise or light
  - Going to bed early
  - Spending too much time in bed awake

Make changes to the factors that may be causing your insomnia if possible. Have a regular bedtime routine. Limit caffeine, alcohol and smoking.

Talk to your doctor if you have a hard time sleeping more than 3 nights a week for a month.

## **Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea is when breathing stops at times during sleep. It most often happens because the muscles at the back of the throat relax and the tongue falls back during sleep, narrowing the airway. The length of time that breathing stops can vary from a few seconds to several minutes. During this time, the body does not get enough oxygen. Sleep apnea can occur many times each night. Untreated sleep apnea can lead to high blood pressure and a higher risk of stroke or heart attack.

See your doctor if your family notices loud snoring, choking or gasping sounds or lack of breathing during sleep. Other signs you may notice include falling asleep during the day and not feeling rested when you wake up in the morning. Treatment of sleep apnea involves keeping the airway open during sleep. This may include:

- Having a sleep study to check how your breathing changes during sleep
- Weight loss
- Avoiding alcohol
- Using a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine to open the airway during sleep

## **Narcolepsy**

Narcolepsy is having a hard time staying awake during the day. A person with narcolepsy may suddenly fall asleep during an activity. Treatment involves taking medicine to help you stay awake during the daytime.

## **Restless Leg Syndrome**

Restless leg syndrome is leg discomfort often felt at night. The discomfort may feel like a creeping, itching or crawling sensation which only gets better by moving the legs. Restless leg syndrome may cause insomnia and daytime sleepiness.

Talk to your doctor about ways to manage the problem. You can also try reducing stress, taking warm baths, massage and stretching exercises to help your muscles relax. Medicine may be prescribed to help discomfort if sleep is greatly disturbed.

## Night Terrors

Night terrors occur when a person wakes suddenly with screaming, confusion or panic. Night terrors are treated with medicines taken during the day.

## Sleepwalking

Sleepwalking is any activity like walking that is done while a person is asleep. The person often does not remember the activity. It is not dangerous to wake a sleep walker, but injuries can occur during sleepwalking. Keep a sleepwalker safe from injury such as blocking the stairs with a gate and removing objects to prevent tripping. Talk to a doctor if there are safety concerns with sleepwalking or if it occurs often.

**Talk to your doctor if you have signs of a sleep problem.** Your doctor may talk to you about ways to manage your problem or order a sleep study. A sleep study is a 6 to 8 hour recording of your brain activity, heart rate, leg movements, oxygen levels and breathing while you sleep at night.