

# Getting a Better Night's Sleep

## Sleep - how much is enough?

Sleep is a great healer. It regenerates your body, and helps you think and work at peak efficiency. So how much sleep do you need? The amount of sleep you need is an individual matter - some people only need five or six hours per night, others need at least eight. The amount of sleep you need also varies from one day to the next and as we get older we tend to sleep less. The amount of sleep we need depends on our individual biological and psychological needs - there are no hard and fast rules. What matters most is not how many hours of sleep you get, but the quality of sleep.

## Insomnia

One person in three suffers from sleep problems in any given year. Many people have difficulty sleeping; whether it be trouble falling asleep, waking up frequently in the night, waking up and having trouble going back to sleep, thinking and worrying in bed, waking up feeling tired, or trouble sleeping without medication. Insomnia can last only a few nights or can become chronic. Insomnia can lead to difficulty concentrating, irritability and tiredness during the day.

## Non-drug strategies to help you sleep better

### Thought control techniques

Stress and anxiety are considered by most experts to be the number one cause of sleeping problems. Worrying about not being able to sleep and worrying when in bed are major causes of insomnia. Strategies for dealing with worry include developing a 'switching off' ritual after work and using self talk, for example deciding not to worry about how much sleep you will get (telling yourself the worst case scenario is you will be tired the next day).

### Relaxation

Regular relaxation can assist sleep patterns and can also be used in bed to assist falling asleep. Techniques include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, yoga, listening to a relaxation tape or peaceful music, visual imagery and aromatherapy.

### Lifestyle strategies

These include regular exercise but not within 2 hours of bedtime, not napping during the day, waiting until you are sleepy before going to bed, getting out of bed and doing a calming activity if you have not fallen asleep within 30 minutes, avoiding eating big meals before bed, eating a healthy diet and avoiding heavy foods or foods containing caffeine before bed (e.g. coffee, chocolate, cola).



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