

SLEEP DISORDERS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Difficulty falling asleep or remaining asleep, being awake off and on, early-morning awakening, or a combination of these. Sleep disorders affect all age groups, but are more common in the elderly. Over 70 sleep disorders have been identified. The main one is insomnia.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Feeling restless when trying to fall asleep.
- Brief sleep followed by wakefulness.
- Normal sleep until very early in the morning (such as 3AM to 4AM), then being wide awake (often with frightening thoughts).
- Periods of no sleep that alternate with periods of excess sleep.
- Feeling sleepy and tired during the day.

CAUSES

Sleep is a normal and natural function of the human body. Nerve cells in the brain control whether you are asleep or awake. When something affects the balance or normal rhythm of these nerve cells, changes in sleep patterns can occur.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Emotional problems:

- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Stress.

Physical problems:

- Sleep apnea (a breathing problem), restless leg syndrome, or narcolepsy (daytime sleepiness).
- Allergies and early-morning wheezing. Other health problems that cause shortness of breath.
- Heartburn or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).
- Painful disorders, such as fibromyalgia or arthritis.
- Medical problems that require urination or bowel movements during the night.
- Alcoholism.
- Use of certain drugs, such as decongestants.
- Drug abuse, including overuse of sleep-inducers.
- Use of stimulants, such as coffee, tea, or cola drinks.
- Withdrawal from addictive substances.
- Obesity.

Lifestyle problems:

- Erratic work hours.
- New environment or location.
- Jet lag after travel.
- Noisy environment (including a snoring partner).
- Lack of physical exercise.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Maintain a healthy lifestyle that includes good sleep habits. Avoid risk factors of sleep disorders.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Most persons can establish good sleep patterns if the underlying cause of the problem is treated or stopped.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Short-term sleep disorders may become chronic.
- Excess daytime sleepiness can affect all aspects of life.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Sometimes, self-care steps are all that is needed.
- Set a routine schedule of going to bed and waking up.
- Try to find ways to reduce stress in your life.
- Relax in a warm bath before bedtime.
- Create a comfortable sleep setting. It should be dark, cool, and quiet. Don't turn your bedroom into an office.
- Turn off your mind. Focus on peaceful and relaxing thoughts. Play soft music or relaxation tapes.
- Use earplugs, eye shades, or an electric blanket.
- If self-help fails, see your health care provider. A physical exam and medical tests may be done to help find the cause. An overnight sleep study may be prescribed.
- Your treatment plan will depend on the cause. It may include lifestyle changes, drugs, medical devices, or counseling.
- To learn more, do an Internet search or visit a library.

MEDICATION

- Your health care provider may prescribe sleep-inducing drugs for a short period of time.
- Melatonin, a nonprescription product, may help some people. Ask your health care provider.
- Drugs may be prescribed if a disorder is diagnosed.

ACTIVITY

Exercise regularly, but not within 2 hours of bedtime.

DIET

Don't eat within 3 hours of bedtime if indigestion is a problem. A glass of warm milk before bedtime may help. Avoid caffeine.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of any type of sleep disorder.
- Sleep problems don't improve, despite treatment.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page