



A good night's sleep!



Insomnia and not getting a good night's sleep can be frustrating and impact on your day to day living and quality of life. Picture: <https://ksmedcenter.com>

Sleeping disorders

SLEEP is a complex biological process. While you are sleeping, you are unconscious, but your brain and body functions are still active.

So when you don't get enough quality sleep, it does more than just make you feel tired. It can affect your physical and mental health, thinking, and daily functioning.

There are four stages of sleep, based on how active your brain is.

The first two are light. Stage three is "deep sleep," when your brain waves slow down and it's harder for you to wake up.

During these periods, your body repairs tissues, works on growth and development, boosts your immune system, and builds up energy for the next day.

Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep usually starts about 90 minutes after you fall asleep.

Brain activity increases, your eyes dart around quickly, and your pulse, blood pressure, and breathing speed up.

REM sleep is important for learning and memory. It's when your brain handles information you've taken in during the day and stores it in your long-term memory.

The amount of sleep a person needs depends on many things, including their age. In general:

- Infants and children can range from 11-14 hours a day;
- Teenagers and adults averaging six-10 hours a day; and
- Older adults (ages 65 and older) need seven-eight hours of sleep each day.

The amount of sleep a person needs goes up if they've missed

sleep in previous days.

If you don't have enough, you'll have a "sleep debt," which is much like being overdrawn at a bank.

Eventually, your body will demand that you start to repay the debt.

The effects of sleep deprivation:

- Memory problems;
- Lack of motivation and Irritability;
- Slower reaction times;
- A weakened immune system, raising your chances of getting sick;
- Higher chances of conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack, or obesity;
- Wrinkled skin and dark circles under your eyes;
- Overeating and weight gain; and
- Trouble solving problems and making decisions.

"Studies allude that sleep deprivation can have rather worse effects with sleep deprived participants in a driving simulator than those who had been given alcohol."

So what are sleep disorders in essence and how are they treated?

Sleep disorders are conditions that disturb your normal sleep patterns.

There are more than 80 different sleep disorders. Some major types include:

- **Insomnia** — being unable to fall asleep and stay asleep. This is the most common sleep disorder;
- **Sleep apnea** — a breathing disorder in which you stop breathing for 10 seconds or more during sleep;
- **Restless leg syndrome (RLS)** — a tingling or prickly sensation in your legs, along with a powerful

urge to move them;

□ **Hypersomnia** — being unable to stay awake during the day. This includes narcolepsy, which causes extreme daytime sleepiness;

□ **Circadian rhythm disorders** — problems with the sleep-wake cycle. They make you unable to sleep and wake at the right times; and

□ **Parasomnia** — acting in unusual ways while falling asleep, sleeping, or waking from sleep, such as walking, talking, or eating.

The most common of the disorders is insomnia, which is frustrating to the person experiencing it and may have them resort to any method possible to repay the debt of a frail and tired body.

It can be caused by jet lag, stress and anxiety, hormones, or digestive problems.

It may also be a symptom of another condition.

This disorder is most prevalent among older adults and women.

Treatment for sleep disorders including insomnia can vary depending on the type and underlying cause.

However, it generally includes a combination of medical treatments and lifestyle changes.

Medical treatments

- Prescription medications;
- melatonin supplements;
- allergy or cold medication;
- medications for any underlying health issues; and
- breathing device or surgery (usually for sleep apnea).

The main disadvantage of taking sleeping pills is the risk of physical or psychological dependency.

There are also various side effects such as day time sleepiness,

confusion, memory disturbances, headaches and dizziness.

When taken on a continual basis, they generally become less effective.

This may cause the user to exceed the recommended dosage.

Sleeping pills can also interact with prescription medication and aggravate certain medical conditions, such as high blood pressure.

OTC sleeping pills are not recommended for breastfeeding mothers, or those suffering from heart problems or glaucoma.

Individuals should limit usage to the lowest dosage and not use sleeping pills continuously for longer than two to three weeks.

The above shortfall of dependence, overdose and drug interaction can be addressed using herbal/natural sleep aids such as melatonin and magnesium (melatonin is a hormone that your body produces naturally, and it signals to your brain that it's time to sleep), valerian root and lavender aromatherapy to name a few.

You should consult your doctor and pharmacist before using any herbs or OTC medications for sleep, especially since there's the potential for drug interactions with medications such as blood thinners.

Lifestyle changes

Lifestyle adjustments can greatly improve your quality of sleep, especially when they're done along with medical treatments. Consider:

- incorporating more vegetables and fish into your diet, and reducing sugar intake
- reducing stress and anxiety by exercising and stretching

□ creating and sticking to a regular sleeping schedule

□ limiting your caffeine intake, especially in the late afternoon or evening

□ decreasing tobacco and alcohol use

□ eating smaller low carbohydrate meals before bedtime

The effects of sleep disorders can be so disruptive that you will likely want immediate relief.

Unfortunately, long-term cases can take a bit more time to resolve.

However, if you stick with your treatment plan and regularly communicate with your doctor and pharmacist, you can find your way to better sleep.

■ Avneet Nand is a pharmacist at Oceania Hospitals Pte Ltd. The views expressed are the author's and does not necessarily reflect the views of this newspaper.

Your Health
 Courtesy of:
 OCEANIA HOSPITALS PTE LTD