



COMMON SLEEP PROBLEMS

CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF POOR SLEEP



Regular and sufficient sleep plays a vital role in physical health, enabling the body to heal and repair.

Although each individual's sleep needs are unique, on average, most adults require seven to eight hours of sleep each night to feel alert and well rested.

However, many of us do not get this much sleep on a regular basis. Over time feeling tired may become accepted as normal, resulting in decreased cognitive function and a negative impact on long term health.

This month we take a closer look at common sleep problems and explore some ideas for getting a better night's sleep.

UNDERSTANDING SLEEP

When we sleep our bodies go through two cycles: **Rapid Eye Movement (REM)** and **Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM)**. There are four stages of NREM.

In general, an individual will progress through the four stages of NREM sleep before going into REM sleep, then return to stage one NREM and the cycle begins again. A complete sleep cycle can take up to 100 minutes, with each stage lasting between 5 and 15 minutes.

Stages of sleep

Stage 1: is light sleep where a person drifts in and out of sleep and they are easily woken.

Stage 2: is light sleep where eye movement stops, the heart rate slows and body temperature drops. The body is getting ready for deep sleep.

Stages 3 & 4: are the deep sleep stages. During deep sleep, hormones are released which restore and repair the body. The immune system is also strengthened during deep sleep.

REM stage: During REM sleep, an individual's eyes move quickly in different directions and the brain is more active. Typically dreaming occurs during REM sleep.



Did you know?

Babies can spend up to 50% of their sleep in the REM stage, compared to 20% for adults.

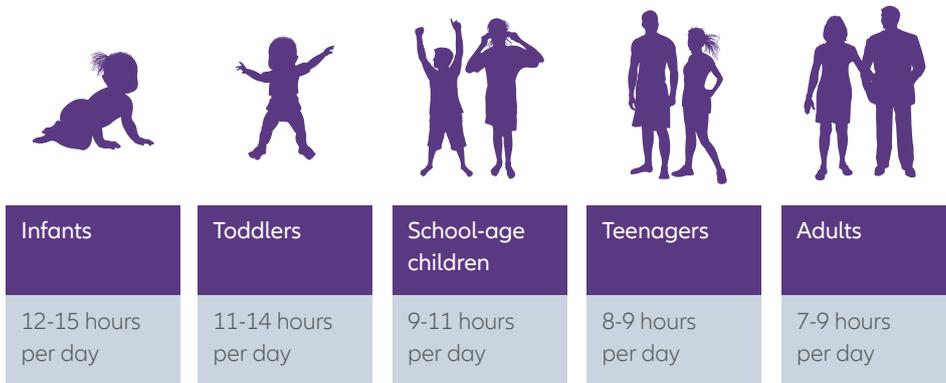
Failure to cycle through the stages of sleep can have a significant impact on the body and have serious consequences while awake.

HOW MUCH SLEEP DO WE NEED?

Studies on sleep patterns have found that women aged between 30-60 sleep, on average, 30 minutes longer than men of the same age, with middle-aged men getting the least sleep of all.

The biggest impact on sleep duration is average bedtime, the later a person stays up into the night, the less sleep they get, however the time they wake up has little effect on sleep duration.

The amount of sleep a person needs to function at their best varies depending on the individual. In general:



Did you know?

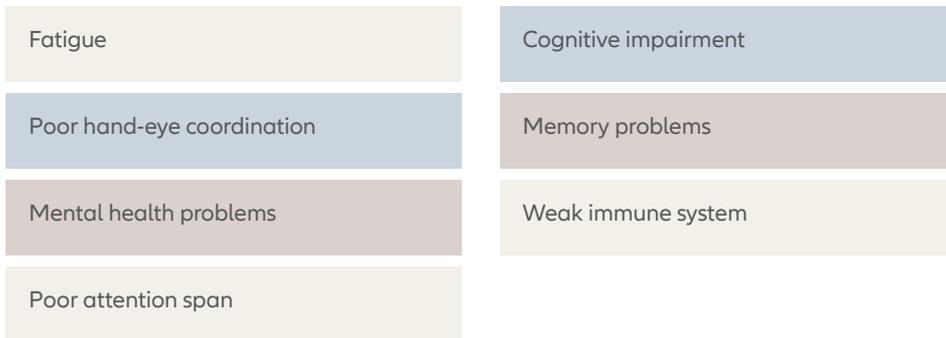
On average, women aged between 30-60 sleep for 30 minutes longer than men of the same age.

Many adults sleep less in older age, however their bodies still require as much sleep as when they were younger.

*The amount of sleep needed also increases if a person has been deprived of sleep in previous days. Getting too little sleep creates a **sleep debt**.*

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR SLEEP

Lack of sleep may cause:



Driving while sleep deprived or drowsy is extremely dangerous. Studies have shown that when driving, sleep-deprived individuals perform as badly or worse than those who are intoxicated.

Never drive if:



Did you know?

Studies have shown that middle-aged men get the least sleep.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

There are some warning signs which can alert us to sleep deprivation and allow for remedial action to be taken:

Falling asleep when you want to be awake

Falling asleep when you're not actively engaged in an activity, or having trouble staying awake when it's not bed time, could point to sleep problems.

Excessive coffee consumption

Because caffeine is a stimulant, many people use it after waking up in the morning or as a pick me up during the day. However, feeling like you need to drink coffee to stay active and alert throughout the day may be an indication that you are not getting the rest you need.

Caffeine is ok in moderation, however, excessive consumption can exacerbate sleep problems and can lead to insomnia and anxiety.

Memory problems

If you are having memory problems, it may be a sign of sleep deprivation.

Sleep is crucial for learning and forming memories, lack of sleep impairs a person's ability to learn efficiently and consolidate a memory, so that it can be recalled in the future.

Weight gain

If the brain is not getting the energy it needs from sleep it will often try to get it from food. Lack of sleep can increase the production of ghrelin and leptin in the body, causing increased cravings for sugary foods and inhibiting our natural ability to feel full.

Excessive sleeping on day's off

We all deserve a lie in on our day's off. However, regularly staying in bed for 11 or more hours on weekends can indicate that the body is making up for a sleep deficit.

This is not a healthy sleep pattern, as the body is trying to make up for having too little sleep on a regular basis.

Waking up tired

Waking up and feeling tired or with a sore throat, dry mouth, or headache could point to a sleep problem caused by issues such as sleep apnoea or acid reflux.

More irritable than usual

When sleep-deprived, people tend to be more moody and irritable. Sleep and mood are closely connected, poor or inadequate sleep can cause irritability, stress, anxiety and anger.



Did you know?

Sleep duration is mainly determined by the time we go to bed.

Good sleeping habits

A good night's sleep repairs the body and mind, which helps you function at your best. Some tips to help your body get the rest it needs include:

- Go to bed and wake up at approximately the same time each day
- Avoid long naps during the day
- Keep your room cool, quiet, and dark
- Follow a routine to help relax before sleep.
- Exercise regularly – but avoid working out close to bedtime
- Avoid watching television in bed
- Switch off electronic devices and mobile phones at bedtime
- Reduce caffeine intake throughout the day
- Don't eat big meals before bedtime
- If having trouble sleeping, get up do something relaxing until you feel tired



Did you know?

Every additional half hour of sleep makes a difference to daily cognitive function.

COMMON SLEEP PROBLEMS

For some people sleep deprivation may be the result of a sleep disorder, which may be interrupting their sleep cycle and preventing quality sleep.

Snoring

Snoring is a common condition that can affect anyone, although it occurs more frequently in men and people who are overweight.

The noise produced when snoring is a result of the flow of air through the mouth and nose being obstructed. It can cause poor quality sleep, for the snorer and their bed partner.

To prevent snoring, snorers should try to:

- sleep on their side rather than their back
- lose weight
- avoid alcohol
- stay well hydrated

Sleep apnea

Sleep apnea occurs when the upper airway becomes blocked, causing shallow breathing or interruptions in breathing for a short period. This interruption can cause the person to wake suddenly gasping for breath.

Sleep apnea is more common in men, particularly those who are overweight or obese.

Symptoms of sleep apnea may include:

- fatigue
- snoring
- waking suddenly with breathlessness
- dry mouth or headaches in the morning
- lack of concentration
- restlessness during sleep
- still tired after waking in morning

Losing weight and avoiding alcohol are among the most effective ways of helping avoid sleep apnea.

Bruxism

Teeth grinding is very common when sleeping, if it occurs on a regular basis, the teeth can be damaged and pain may be experienced in the jaw.

Although the causes of bruxism are not clearly understood, it can be prevented by using a mouth guard supplied by a dentist.

Insomnia

Insomnia occurs when a person does not get enough sleep, they may be finding it difficult to fall asleep or they wake frequently.

Insomnia is often temporary, as a result of anxiety, too much caffeine, stress or poor sleeping habits.

Symptoms of insomnia may include:

- finding it hard to fall asleep
- waking frequently and having trouble getting back to sleep
- waking early, before it is necessary
- feeling tired in the morning after waking
- feeling drowsy during the day

Adhering good sleeping habits is one of the most effective ways of combating insomnia.

Restless leg syndrome

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) also known as Willis-Ekbom Disease, is a movement disorder where a person experiences unpleasant urges to move the legs while at rest. Symptoms of RLS are most severe at night and can disrupt sleep.

Lifestyle changes, such as good sleep habits, exercise and reducing caffeine can help alleviate the symptoms of RLS.

Jet Lag

Jet lag occurs when a person moves through several time zones in a short period, and their body clock (circadian rhythm) has not adjusted, it can take many days for the body to readjust to the new time zone. This causes fatigue, poor concentration and trouble sleeping.

To help prevent jet lag, try to:

- get a good night's sleep the night before departure
- avoid stress on the day of a flight
- if possible depart during day time
- reset your watch to the new time zone when you board a flight
- stay well hydrated during a flight
- on arrival, stay awake until bedtime (local time)
- practice good sleeping habits at your destination



YOUR INTERNATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE COVER

Sleep is essential and has a big impact on every aspect of daily life, getting a good night's sleep is key for optimal health and performance throughout the day. Although people may often experience an occasional bad night's sleep, problems may begin when poor and ineffective sleep becomes a regular pattern.

Although some sleep problems are simply irritating for you or your partner, other issues which impact on regular sleep can be more serious.

Aim to eat a nutritious and balanced diet, maintain a healthy weight and follow the good sleeping habits outlined above. Sweet dreams.

Dr Ulrike Sucher, Medical Director, Allianz Partners.