

Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#64 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

Sleep

Are You Getting Enough?



• Available in Spanish and Chinese: call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite nyc.gov/health
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Many people don't get enough sleep

Most need 7 or 8 hours a night.

- Some need less, others more.
- Children need a lot of sleep – 9 to 11 hours a night for school-age kids and up to 18 hours a day for newborns. Sleep is especially important for learning and memory.
- Almost half of adults don't get enough sleep, or have problems sleeping.
- It's possible to get too much sleep. Adults who sleep more than 9 hours a day may have depression or another illness.

Some reasons that people don't get enough sleep:

- Stress or a fast-paced lifestyle.
- Too many activities and responsibilities.
- Irregular work schedules.
- Children or pets in the bed.
- Aches and pains or illness (including depression).
- Tobacco, caffeine, alcohol and other drugs, including many over-the-counter and prescription medications.

1. Keep a daily diary of your sleep patterns and habits to help you find out what keeps you from sleeping.

2. Go to bed only when you feel sleepy.

The sleepier you are, the faster you'll fall asleep.

3. Maintain a regular sleep schedule.

- Wake up and go to bed at the same time every day, even on weekends.
- Don't oversleep to "catch up" – this can confuse your body clock and make it harder to get to sleep.
- If you sleep longer on the weekends, you probably aren't getting enough sleep during the week.

4. Make your bedroom peaceful and comfortable.

- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and cool. Your bed should be comfortable and provide support.
- Heavy window shades can help. Try an eye mask or ear plugs if light or noise bothers you.
- Sound or "white noise" machines or meditation tapes help some people.

Sleep disorders can cause health problems

There are three common sleep disorders.

- **Sleep apnea:** the person stops breathing, sometimes hundreds of times a night.
- **Sleep deprivation (sleep debt):** not getting enough sleep night after night.
- **Insomnia:** trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Insomnia can be either temporary or long-term.

Sleep disorders can cause or worsen many problems.

- Feeling sleepy or tired all day.
- Falling asleep when driving or operating machinery.
- Poor memory, concentration and learning.
- Irritability and mood swings.
- More colds and other infections.
- Over the long-term: overweight, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

5. If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes ...

- Get up and do something relaxing. Try reading in dim light. Or sit quietly in the dark until you start to feel sleepy.
- Don't turn on bright lights, because this tells your body to wake up.

6. Develop sleep rituals.

- Tell your body that it's time to sleep by doing the same things every night just before bed.
- Listen to relaxing music, read something light, do relaxation exercises, or take a hot bath.

7. Don't watch TV or work in bed.

- Make "Going to bed" mean "Going to sleep."
- Don't watch TV in bed (unless it helps you fall asleep in 10 or 15 minutes). Don't play video games, make phone calls, answer e-mails, or pay bills in bed.
- You'll fall asleep faster if you use your bed only for rest, sleep, and intimacy.

Ways to improve



8. Get regular physical activity.

- Regular exercise helps you stay healthy and sleep better. Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, such as a brisk walk, at least 5 days a week.
- Try to schedule exercise earlier in the day. (Physical activity right before bed may make it harder to get to sleep.)

9. Avoid caffeine and alcohol for several hours before bed.

- Caffeine from coffee, tea, cola, chocolate and some medicines can keep you awake. The effects of caffeine can last up to 16 hours.
- If you cut back on caffeine and still have problems sleeping, try not using it at all.
- Alcohol may *seem* to help you sleep better, but it actually interrupts sleep.

your sleep



If you still have problems sleeping

If you have a sleeping partner, ask if you snore, have leg movements, or stop breathing in your sleep. These could be signs of sleep apnea.

Talk to your doctor.

- You may have a sleep disorder that should be treated.
- Ask your doctor if a sleep study or behavioral therapy might help. Many insurance plans now cover these services.

Be careful with sleep medications.

- Long-term use causes some people to become dependent on them, or experience side effects such as dizziness, daytime sleepiness and worse insomnia.
- Always talk to a health-care provider before taking any over-the-counter medicines. And never take another person's prescription medicine.

More Information and Help

- **NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** nyc.gov/health or call 311 and ask for Sleep
- **National Sleep Foundation:** www.sleepfoundation.org
- **American Academy of Sleep Medicine:** www.sleepeducation.com
- **Consumer Reports sleep report:** www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org



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