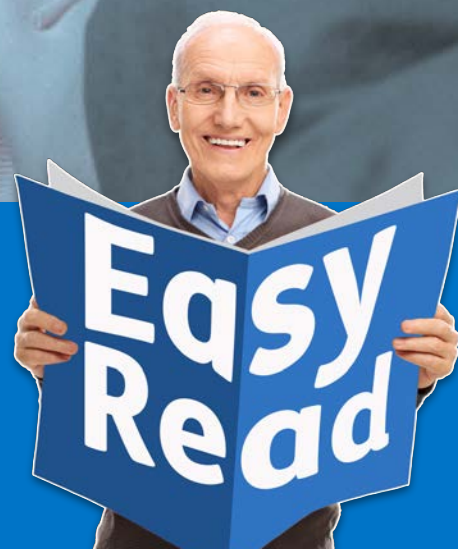


# I Cannot Sleep

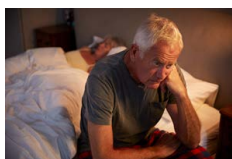


**MindEd**  
**for Families**

*online advice and support you can trust*

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# Can't sleep



Most adults have a problem with sleeping at some time.

It can affect people at any age.



Sleeping difficulties are common in women, children and older adults.

Older people:

- Sleep less during the night
- Have more broken sleep
- Sleep less deeply
- Tend to spend longer in bed
- Often take daytime naps
- Often have difficulty falling asleep.



# Insomnia



**Insomnia** is the word we use when people regularly have difficulty with their sleep.



It's more than finding it hard to get to sleep or staying asleep.



People with **insomnia** can have one or more of these:

- Difficulty falling asleep



- Waking up often during the night and having trouble going back to sleep



- Waking up too early in the morning



- Not feeling refreshed when waking in the morning.

# Sleep



## Why do we need sleep?

Sleep helps:

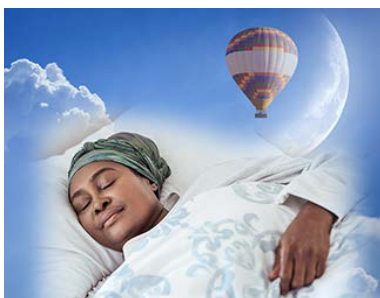
- To give us energy
- To remove waste chemicals from the brain
- Us to learn and remember
- To control our mood, appetite and sex drive.



## Two types of sleep

There are two different types of sleep:

- Slow-wave sleep (SWS), known as deep sleep
- Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, also called dreaming sleep

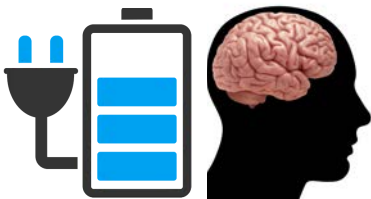


## Slow wave sleep

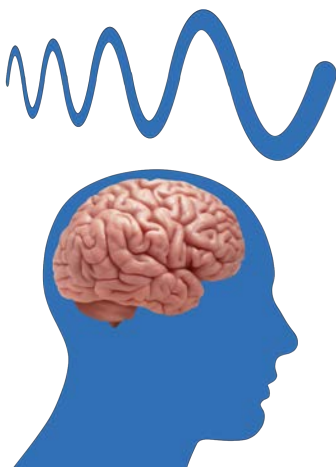
Most of the sleeping we do is slow wave sleep.



Our muscles are relaxed and our breathing is slow.



This helps our brain and body to recharge after a long day.



The brain gradually goes into four different stages of slow-wave sleep each more deep than the next.



## Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep

The first REM sleep stage lasts around 10 minutes and usually happens after having been asleep at least 90 minutes.



Your eyes move rapidly in all directions during REM sleep. This is when you dream.



Your brain is highly active, but your muscles stop working during this time. Your breathing and heart rate go up and down.



We don't know why we have REM sleep.

# How long should we sleep?



Normal sleep is usually between 6 - 8 hours a day.

Some people can manage on between 4 - 6 hours a day.

As we get older:



- We sleep a little less: about 6.5 to 7 hours per night
- It may be harder to fall asleep and you may spend more total time in bed
- The change between sleep and waking up will happen more quickly. This makes you feel you are a lighter sleeper than when you were younger.



Older people:



- Spend less time in deep, dreamless sleep
- Wake up more in the night - about 3 or 4 times.



# Sleep problems



Many things can cause sleep problems, including:

- Worrying about not sleeping



- Needing to go to the toilet in the night.

This is normal but it can be frustrating if you can't get back to sleep



- Pain



- Some medications



- Depression. People with depression often wake up early in the morning and don't get back to sleep.

You may get sleep problems if the room is:



- New to you



- Too cold



- Too noisy



- Too hot



- Too light.



You may get sleep problems if you get a break to your sleep routine with:

- Air travel
- Shift working.

# Getting a better night's sleep



There are things you can do to get a better night's sleep:

- Get up at the same time every morning



- Have a regular bedtime routine

A warm bath before bedtime can help.

- Don't worry

Try to relax and don't worry about your sleep too much before going to bed.



Reading and listening to relaxation tapes can help.



- Avoid **caffeine**, alcohol and nicotine



**Caffeine** is a drug which is in coffee, tea, fizzy drinks, chocolate and some medicines.



**Nicotine** is a chemical that is in cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and medications to help you stop smoking.



Alcohol may help you get off to sleep but it breaks up the second half of sleep so you feel less refreshed in the morning

- Eat some carbohydrates



**Carbohydrates** are in food such as pasta, rice, bread and potatoes.



Don't eat a big meal within 1-2 hours of going to bed.

Eating sugar and sweet things may stop you sleeping.



- Don't look at screens for an hour before bedtime

The light from television, computer, iPad or mobile phone screens stop your brain releasing a chemical in the brain which helps you to go to sleep.



- Have a comfortable bed and bedroom

People tend to sleep better in colder rooms.

Leaving a radio on with soft familiar music can help.



- Don't lie awake more than an hour if you are not asleep

Get up for a short while, and then go back to bed.

Don't watch television or use your mobile phone.



- Don't have daytime naps  
They can make it harder to sleep at night.



- Exercise  
Exercise during the day reduces the time it takes to fall asleep and increases total sleep time at night.



- Daylight  
Get at least 8 hours of natural daylight so your brain knows there has been a day.  
Keep your curtains open during daylight.  
This will help your internal body clock.

# Treatment for insomnia



If you have serious problems with sleeping you should see your local doctor (GP). They may suggest one of these treatments.

## **Cognitive behavioural therapy-insomnia (CBT-I)**



This is a type of talking therapy for people with insomnia.

It aims to change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that may be stopping you from sleeping.



You may see a specially trained GP or a clinical psychologist.



You may do this therapy one-to-one or in a group.

## Sleeping Tablets

Sleeping tablets are not used so much these days.



They are not good to use over a long period of time.

They can make you sleepy in the mornings.



Some people become dependent on them and find it difficult to stop using them.

### A. Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines are not used so much these days.



They are not good to use over a long period of time.



These are medicines that reduce anxiety. They help to make you calm and relaxed.





Temazepam, clonazepam, diazepam and nitrazepam are all types of benzodiazepine.

They can make you sleepy in the day and dizzy.



You should not drive if you feel sleepy or dizzy.

## B. Z-drugs

These are a newer type of drug and include medications called zolpidem and zopiclone .



They are not good to use over a long period of time.



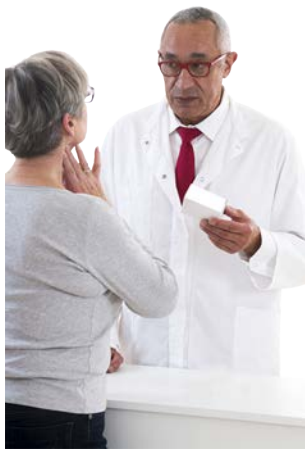
They can make you sleepy in the day and dizzy.

They also have other effects on some people.

## C. Circadin

This is sometimes used to help you fall asleep and wake up at the right times for you.

It can also give you a headache, or some pain.



## Over the counter medication

You can buy some medications for insomnia from your pharmacy.

These will make you feel drowsy. They will not deal with the causes of your sleeping problems.



Some people take herbs and plants which they find helpful.



You should speak with your local doctor (GP) if you are using any over the counter medication for a long time.



You should not buy sleeping tablets on the internet. You can't be sure about what you are getting.

# For more information

This resource is part of the MindEd online learning site.



For more information please contact:-

**Web:** [www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk](http://www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk)



**Email:** [MindEd@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:MindEd@rcpsych.ac.uk)



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