



SEEING YOUR DOCTOR

Effective management of sleep problems begins with a visit to your physician. Early assessment and action can prevent a short-term sleep problem from developing into a chronic one. Through a careful evaluation, your doctor can determine the cause of your sleep complaint and recommend the best course of action.

But your doctor can help you only if you take the initiative, and if you clearly and precisely describe your problem. If you are unaccustomed to discussing sleep problems with your physician, the following tips can help you communicate more effectively:

- Before speaking to your doctor, think about specific examples of the nighttime and daytime symptoms that bother you, how often and when these symptoms usually occur. Also think about what, if anything, you have done to manage these problems. A sleep diary, a daily log of your sleep and wake habits, is an excellent tool for collecting this information.
- If you are having trouble sleeping, don't wait for your regular checkup or another medical problem to visit your doctor. By making an appointment specifically to discuss your sleep problem, you're assured of sufficient time to fully discuss your concerns. If, however, you wish to address your concerns as part of another visit, mention your sleep problem early in the examination, not as an aside or as you are walking out the door.
- If applicable, speak with your partner beforehand or bring that person with you to provide information about anything he or she notices about your sleep. For example, you may experience many brief awakenings or snoring episodes during the night that you do not recall, but your partner does.

If you do not feel comfortable with your physician's recommendations for dealing with your sleep problem, or if you feel your doctor is not taking your problem seriously, you may want to consider seeking a second opinion -- perhaps from a sleep specialist. If your doctor dismisses your sleep problem or does not acknowledge it seriously, be persistent. Emphasize the effects that poor sleep is having on your life and request a recommendation for appropriate treatment.

The information you provide can help your physician determine the most likely cause of your sleep problem. Some common causes of sleep troubles include:

- Poor sleep habits, such as exercising or drinking caffeine too close to bedtime.
- Stressful events, such as the death of a loved one or a new job.
- Use of medications that can interfere with sleep, such as those used to control high blood pressure or asthma.
- Chronic medical conditions that cause pain during the night;

- Sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, in which breathing is interrupted numerous times during the night.

Depending on the origin of your sleep problem, your physician can recommend an appropriate treatment. When your sleep problem results from an underlying psychiatric condition, physicians will typically treat the underlying problem first. However, in the case of a medical problem such as arthritis that disrupts sleep due to pain or discomfort, the doctor may provide a medication or other treatment to help you sleep -- at the same time that he or she is attempting to better manage your physical health.

For sleep complaints that are due to factors such as temporary stress or poor sleep habits, most sleep experts recommend lifestyle changes, sometimes in combinations with short-term use of a prescription sleep medication to help stop the cycle of poor sleep quickly. In a 1993 Gallup survey of 300 sleep experts, 69 percent of respondents said they considered this combined approach to be very effective for short-term insomnia, compared with behavioral methods (18%) or medication (32%) alone.

Some Lifestyle / Behavior Changes Doctors May Recommend

Pre - Sleep

- Exercise regularly. However, while regular physical activity is good, exercising just before going to bed may actually make it harder to sleep.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine in the late afternoon and evening.
- If you have trouble sleeping at night, don't nap during the day since naps affect your ability to sleep at night.

Bedtime Customs

- Create a bedroom environment that is comfortable for sleeping; keep it cool, dark and free of noise.
- Use the bedroom for sleep only. Do not read, work or even watch television in bed.
- Establish a consistent sleep and wake schedule, as well as a regular bedtime routine.
- Read a relaxing book or listen to soothing music before getting into bed.
- Take a warm bath.
- If stressful thoughts or problems are weighing on your mind, write them down so you can put them aside for the night.
- If you are unable to fall asleep, get out of bed, leave the room and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy again.

Sleep Medications

When supplemented by lifestyle changes, short-term use of sleep medications may be a safe and effective therapy for individuals who have difficulty falling or staying asleep. Discuss with your doctor whether use of a sleep medication is appropriate for you.

In general, sleep medications can be divided into two categories: non-prescription and prescription. Never drink alcoholic beverages while you are taking any kind of sleep medication.

Non - Prescription

Non-prescription sleep medications (those available without a prescription) typically contain an antihistamine, which induces drowsiness. Although many people use non-prescription sleep aids, they are not effective for everyone. It is important to remember that although they do not require a prescription, they can, like prescription medications, cause side effects, including dry mouth and dry eyes. Because they can also interact with other medications that you may be taking, you may want to talk with your doctor or pharmacist before using a non-prescription sleep aid.

Melatonin, a naturally occurring hormone (available as a dietary supplement in health food stores) has also been promoted in the media as a sleep aid. However, there currently are insufficient clinical data to establish its safety and efficacy for this use.

Prescription

When used appropriately, prescription sleep medications can be both effective and safe. However, as with all medications, drug interactions and side effects can be experienced by some individuals. Some of the side effects seen with prescription sleep medications include next-day drowsiness, "rebound" insomnia (in which the insomnia gets worse for a short while after the medication is discontinued), and temporary memory loss (involving events occurring shortly after the drug is taken). In addition, some products may cause dependence when used regularly for longer than a few weeks or at high doses.

Generally, prescription sleep medications are limited to short-term use (7 to 10 days), and re-evaluation by a physician is recommended if they are to be taken for a longer period.

QUESTIONS YOUR DOCTOR MAY ASK

Write your answers in the space provided & bring this sheet to your appointment

- 1) How long has your sleep problem lasted? _____

- 2) What are your symptoms? _____

- 3) Have you had any recent changes in your life? _____

- 4) Have you had any recent illnesses? _____

- 5) Are you currently being treated for a health problem? _____

- 6) What over-the-counter and prescription medications are you taking? _____

- 7) Have you done any self-care to help your sleep problem? _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

- 1) What do you think is causing my sleep problem(s)?
- 2) Do you recommend any tests? If yes, how will these tests help me?
Who will do these tests?
- 3) Do I need to see a sleep specialist?
- 4) What treatment plan do you recommend?
Questions to ask if a Sleep Medication is recommended
 - 1) Why has this drug been recommended?
 - 2) What are the possible side effects?
 - 3) Will it interact with other drugs I'm taking?
 - 4) What is the recommended schedule: dosage, timing and duration?
 - 5) What other things should I be doing to help solve my sleep problem?