



Mood Disorders Society of Canada
La Société Pour **Les Troubles de L'Humeur** du Canada

What Better Sleep Feels Like: A Guide to Maintaining Wellness





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Introduction

Getting enough quality sleep is crucial to your physical, mental and emotional health. It performs a number of functions that enhance your quality of life and improves health-related outcomes. However, sleep is often undervalued or ignored due to the belief we can always ‘just push through’ without enough sleep. This approach ignores the reality that a lack of quality sleep can be caused by, and even worsen, other underlying mental or physical health issues. A lack of sleep impacts every aspect of our lives, including relationships with family and friends along with our performance at work.

You are not alone in struggling with sleep. Millions of Canadians face some issue with sleep every year. Luckily, there are many steps you can take to improve the amount and quality of your sleep, ranging from things you can start doing yourself today, to reaching out for professional help. By recognizing your struggles with sleep, you are closer to finding the specific help you need.

The following guide will discuss the importance of sleep, the function it performs for your body and mind, along with the potential impacts of a lack of sleep. It will also provide an overview of how to recognize when a lack of quality sleep is more than just a lack of opportunity or proper environment. Finally, it will discuss the common causes of sleep issues, and what to do if you believe they apply to you. **Above all, we want you to know there is help for you and you are not alone in facing issues with sleep.**

How Do I Know If I’m Getting Enough Quality Sleep?

Everybody has had times when they have had more or less sleep than normal. Taking care of newborns, work demands, or even everyday social engagements often disrupt our sleep. In response to these disturbances, we choose to “push through”. So how do we know when our sleep may be causing issues to us?

What Does Sleep Do and How Does Sleep Work?

First, we need to understand what sleep is, and crucially, what it does. Sleep performs a number of functions that are beneficial to your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Sleep allows the body and brain to:

- Eliminate toxins
- Repair the body
- Energize muscle and nerve cells
- Regulate blood sugar
- Improve learning and memory
- Increase creativity
- Regulate mood & stress
- Boost immunity (including enhancing the response to vaccinations)

It is also important to understand that all sleep is not the same. Each night you cycle through different stages of sleep, each serving different purposes.

Stage 0

Stage 0 - Awake

This is the time spent in bed before and immediately after falling asleep. This typically takes an adult 10 to 20 minutes to fall asleep. Crucially, if your sleep is disturbed one or more times each evening at this stage, this can end up reducing the amount of time you spend in the other stages of sleep.

Stage 1

Stage 1 - Light Sleep

You spend just over half of your sleep time in light sleep. During this stage, the muscles relax, and your breathing and heart rate drop. You are also very easy to wake during this stage of sleep.



Stage 2

Stage 2 - Deep Sleep

Also known as restorative sleep, this stage takes up about one-fifth of your sleep. This stage mainly **benefits your body**, as it allows you to repair muscle and tissue and flush toxins and waste. It is also the stage of sleep that most benefits your immune system.

Stage 3

Stage 3 - REM Sleep

Perhaps the most well-known type of sleep, this stage takes up around one-quarter of your time sleeping. It is during this stage that the **brain “recharges”**, which is believed to benefit learning, memory and emotional regulation. This stage is also associated with dreaming.

The Sleep Stage Cycle

You move through stages 1-3 of sleep (and 0 if your sleep is disturbed) in roughly 90-minute cycles. However, as your sleep progresses, Deep Sleep decreases and REM Sleep increases. **This means that shorter sleep durations can come at the expense of REM sleep.** Both Deep and REM sleep also decreases with age, increasing the importance of getting enough sleep as we grow older.

So How Much Sleep Do I Need?

The amount of sleep you need changes throughout your life. Broadly, it can be broken down into five developmental stages of life.

0-6

Babies and Toddlers 0-6 years old

Require **12 to 17 hours of sleep**, which should occur **during both the day and night.**

6-12

Children 6-12 years old

While sleep needs start to vary by child, they should be getting **9 to 11 hours of sleep.** In general, **children should no longer require naps during the day.**

12-18

Teens 12-18 years old

Typically require **8 to 10 hours of sleep**, with **sleep patterns naturally shifting later.**

19-65

Adults 19-65 years old

Typically, the longest stage of life, adults require **7 to 9 hours of sleep.**

65+

Seniors 65+ years old

Require **7 to 8 hours of sleep**, with **sleep patterns naturally shifting earlier.** There **may also be a need for daytime naps** due to a reduced quality of sleep during the night.

Is There Something Wrong with Me?

If you are reading this, it may be that you or somebody you know (including a family member or healthcare provider) suspects you are not getting the right amount or quality of sleep. However, you are not alone in facing this issue. Research from a variety of sources indicates that many Canadians are not getting enough quality sleep.



ARE CANADIAN ADULTS GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?¹

Current recommendations¹ are:



Ages 18-64
**7-9
HOURS**
of sleep/night



Ages 65+
**7-8
HOURS**
of sleep/night

But...

1 in 4
adults aged
18-34

1 in 3
adults aged
35-64*

1 in 4
adults aged
65-79

are not getting
enough sleep.

*Significant difference between males and females.

“I’ve always been able to sleep well and restful. But, I grind my teeth - and yes, I wear a guard on my teeth to sleep, and never knew that this was considered a sleep issue - but now I do!”

So What If I’m Not Getting Enough Quality Sleep?

We have all “pushed through” periods where we are not getting the appropriate amount of sleep. But what are the consequences of this, especially when the disruption to sleep persists over an extended period of time?

Short-Term Consequences

Just as getting enough quality sleep provides multiple physical, mental and emotional benefits, a lack of sufficient quality sleep immediately reduces physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. For instance, not getting enough sleep can lead to:

- Fatigue
- Daytime sleepiness
- Headaches
- Irritability & stress
- Lack of patience
- Difficulty focusing & paying attention
- Increased risk of making unhealthy food choices

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada. (2019). Are Canadians Getting Enough Sleep?



“For most of my adult life, I have struggled with sleep issues and often felt alone in my struggles. My sleep disturbances have created issues that have affected my work performance and relationships. When I do not get enough sleep, I have difficulty concentrating, suffer from headaches and can be irritable. My anxiety disorder is also exasperated by my lack of sleep which further enhances its effects. If I do not address my sleep problems my depression can be triggered leading to prolonged illness. I find that I sleep better when I establish a routine and reduce my screen time before bed. I also watch what I eat and drink as this will affect my sleep. I was lucky enough to find the correct combination of medication and lifestyle changes to improve my sleep, but it is an ongoing issue that impacts my life.”

Individually, each of these may seem like minor inconveniences we have all had to endure from time to time, they do have wide-reaching implications.

For example, fatigue and daytime sleepiness can contribute to an increased risk of accidents, as demonstrated by the spike in fatal car accidents each year with the switch to daylight savings time. Daylight savings time results in many people feeling drowsy due to a small loss of sleep or disruption to sleep routine.

There are also emotional implications. Research has shown that both a significant short-term lack of sleep (such as staying up all night) and a more general long-term lack of quality sleep result in reduced empathy, which is the ability to understand another person’s emotions.² This is an important social skill, which impacts relationships with family, friends and colleagues, as well as for jobs where empathy is crucial, such as first responders and health care professionals.

Long-Term Consequences

So what are the implications if a lack of quality sleep persists? In addition to continuing to suffer all of the short-term implications outlined above, prolonged lack of quality sleep is also associated with an increased risk of multiple physical and mental health issues, including:

- Anxiety
- Heart disease or failure
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Strokes
- High blood pressure
- Cancer
- Dementia

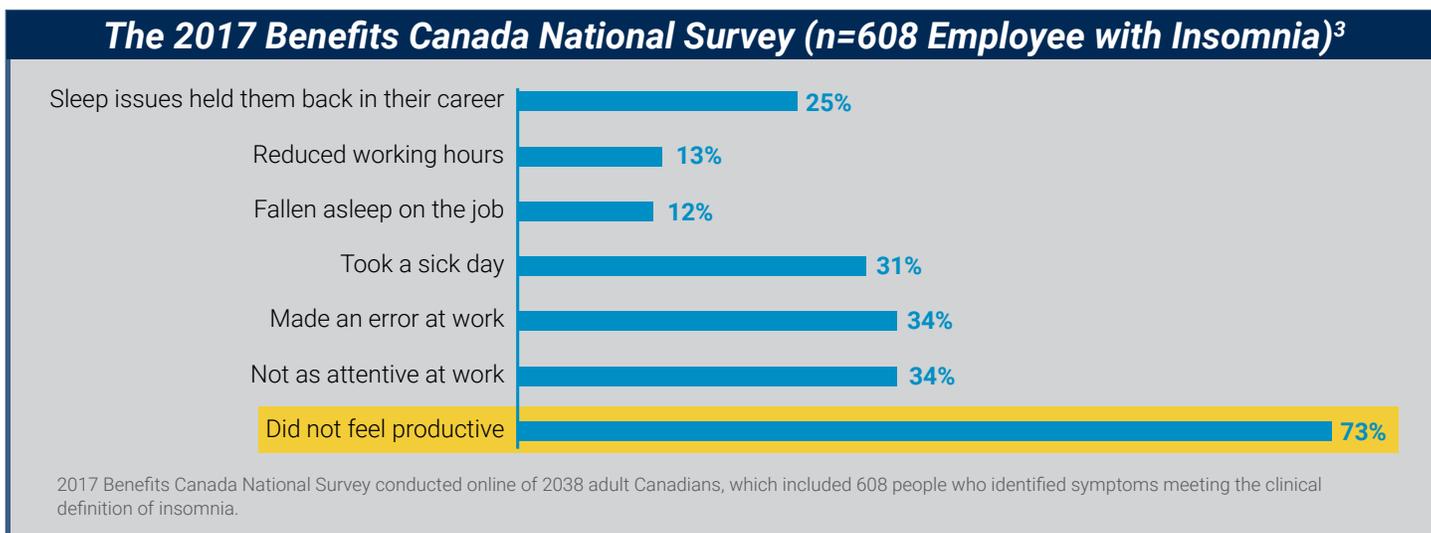
Over time, if untreated, a lack of quality sleep increases overall mortality (risk of death). The risk of mortality is further increased the more symptoms suffered (the three symptoms being difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep, and the feeling that sleep was non-restorative).

2 Guadagni, V., Burles, F., Ferrara, M., & Iaria, G. (2014). The effects of sleep deprivation on emotional empathy. *Journal of sleep research*, 23(6), 657-663. DOI: 10.1111/jsr.12192 and Guadagni, V., Cook, E., Hart, C., Burles, F., & Iaria, G. (2018). Poor sleep quality affects empathic responses in experienced paramedics. *Sleep and Biological Rhythms*, 16(3), 365-368. DOI: 10.1007/s41105-018-0156-8



Wider Consequences

Beyond the above personal consequences, there are wider implications of failing to ensure adequate quality sleep. The mental, emotional and physical consequences can affect immediate and extended family, friends and colleagues. A person with sleep problems may also impact those around them with their fatigue, irritability and inability to concentrate. Family members also face the consequences of having a loved one develop serious health problems like diabetes or cancer. All of this impacts family units, potentially causing additional stress. Many affected by sleep problems also report a negative impact on their careers. A survey of insomnia sufferers reported that 73% did not feel productive at work, while 25% felt it held them back in their careers.



There is also an economic impact to employers, due to increased absenteeism, presenteeism, (working while not being fully concentrating on tasks, with reduced productivity), and higher risk of workplace accidents. In addition, there is also an increased burden on health-care services resulting from the above-mentioned conditions.

Maybe This is a Big Deal?

The short and long-term personal impacts, along with the wider consequences of sleep issues, demonstrate that a lack of quality sleep is not something that can be ignored. As has been shown in this guide you are not alone in facing these concerns. Fortunately, there are many steps that can be taken to help you get the sleep your body and mind needs.

How do I Make Sure I Get Enough Quality Sleep?

Many factors can influence our quality of sleep. Some are general and apply to everybody regardless of whether you currently believe you have sleep issues or not. However, sometimes the root cause of persistent sleep issues is something else. These 'comorbid' conditions often have a 'bi-directional' relationship with sleep, in that a lack of quality sleep makes the root cause worse, which in turn leads to even less quality sleep, creating a downward spiral impossible to escape without addressing the root cause.

General Sleep Hygiene – is Applicable to Everyone

There are several things everybody can do, regardless of the cause or frequency of the sleep problems being experienced. These are actions that promote and enhance the ease with which you fall asleep, your ability to stay asleep, and the quality of sleep. You may not be able to do all of the following actions, but doing as many as possible could significantly improve your sleep.

3 Benefits Canada. (2017). Wake up to the Impact of Insomnia on the Workplace.



Have a set schedule for sleep

We are all creatures of habit. Therefore, having a fixed (within reason) sleep schedule helps promote sleep. Try to:



- **Have a fixed wake-up time**, even on weekends!
- **Prioritize sleep** as much as possible, even when faced with demands such as work, study, and socializing.
- **Ensure any changes to your sleep schedule are gradual**, adjusting by 1-2 hours a night at most.
- **Take it easy on the naps**. Try to keep naps short and take them in the early afternoon so they do not disrupt evening sleep.

Follow a routine when going to bed

Following a bedtime routine that reduces common impediments to sleep can help your body prepare for a good night's sleep in advance. Try to build a routine that is:



- **Consistent**. As discussed already, we are creatures of habit. Simple acts, such as putting on your pajamas or brushing your teeth, when repeated daily can signal to your mind that it is bedtime.
- **Includes time to wind down**. It is very difficult to jump straight from the chaos of life into a good night's sleep. Try to budget time for something you find calming before going to bed, such as reading a book or listening to relaxing music.
- **Dim the lights**. Spending time in brightly lit areas immediately prior to sleep can hinder your production of melatonin, (the hormone the body makes to facilitate sleep). When going through your routine, try to do so with the lights on low.
- **Put down the phone!** Phones, as well as laptops and tablets, all generate blue light that may also reduce melatonin production. They can also be especially mentally stimulating. Try to ensure your sleep routine avoids these electronics.
- **If it isn't happening, don't push it**. We've all had those nights when sleep doesn't want to happen. Remaining in bed and trying to force sleep can diminish the connection your mind has between the bed and sleep, hindering future attempts to sleep. Therefore, after 20 minutes of trying, yet failing to fall asleep, get up for a short while. Repeat something from your routine to help you wind down and signal your mind it is time to sleep before returning to bed.

Make changes during the day

What you do between waking up and trying to go to sleep at night also affects your quality of sleep. There are multiple steps you can take during the day to make it easier to fall and stay asleep, such as:



- **Get out and about**. Sunlight is a key driver of your body's circadian rhythm, the internal process that manages your sleep pattern. Getting outside more often can boost the quality of your sleep.
- **Exercise**. Okay, we know that exercise is always given as a solution to most health issues. However, this is for a good reason, as it does have numerous physical and mental health benefits. As for sleep, regular exercise can make it easier to fall asleep at night.
- **No smoking**. Nicotine is a stimulant that has been shown to disrupt sleep patterns. This has been demonstrated by the correlation between smokers and those suffering from sleep issues.
- **Reduce caffeine intake**. Caffeine is also a stimulant. Try to reduce your intake and avoid caffeine after midday.
- **Reduce alcohol intake**. Unlike nicotine and caffeine, alcohol may help you fall asleep. However, the effects soon wear off, leading to disrupted sleep later that night. Try to reduce the amount you drink and avoid drinking too late at night.
- **Keep dinner (relatively) early**. The later you eat, the greater the chance you will be digesting when you are trying to sleep. Try to avoid especially late meals and keep any pre-bed snacks light.





- **Make bed (mostly) for sleeping.** With the exception of intimacy, make your bed a priority zone for sleep. This further builds the link in your mind between being in bed and sleeping. Spending time in bed watching a show, working or doing any other activity diminishes this link.

“As a person who lives with depression, I find periods of lack of sleep does affect my mood and experiencing daytime fatigue and headaches. If left untreated lack of sleep will worsen my depression symptoms. I find I have to schedule a bedtime routine to allow myself time to decompress at the end of the day. Taking a walk after supper, staying away from caffeine and electronics, finding some quiet time with a good book, makes it easier for me to prepare myself for a better sleep. Routine is key for me, going to bed at a regular time each night makes things easier. I also stay in touch with my family doctor to inform her if I experience any prolonged sleep issues.”

Make your Bedroom as Sleep-Friendly as Possible

Your environment has a significant impact on your ability to fall and stay asleep. To improve your chances of obtaining good sleep, try the following:



- **Make sure your mattress and pillow are comfortable.** It may not be the most exciting thing to invest in, but trying to sleep on an uncomfortable mattress or pillow will significantly reduce your quality of sleep. The ideal mattress and pillow differ depending on the person and how they like to sleep, so make sure you have the right set up for your preferences.



- **Love your bedding.** As with your mattress and pillow, make sure your bedding is to your taste, creating a space you feel comfortable in and look forward to going to each night. Swapping your bedding on a regular basis, not only for hygiene, has been shown to increase eagerness to go to bed, further improving the overall quality of sleep.



- **Find the right temperature.** Make sure your room is the right temperature for you. For most, this is around 18c, and should always be between 15.6c and 22c. A lower, yet still comfortable, room temperature helps keep your body core temperature cooler while you sleep. Being cooler signals to your body that it is time to sleep, as your body naturally expects a drop in temperature during the evening.



- **Make it dark.** Light can interrupt your sleep, so try using heavy curtains, blinds or a facemask to ensure this doesn't happen.
- **Eliminate noise.** Noise can both prevent you from falling asleep and wake you up when you do manage to fall asleep. Reduce noise whenever you can, and consider using earplugs or a white noise machine for those noises you can't make to go away.

- **Try using scents.** Some scents, such as lavender, may put you in a calmer frame of mind, enabling you to enjoy a better night's sleep.

Sleep Issues Associated with Other Conditions

In many cases basic sleep hygiene, while beneficial, will not fully address problems with sleep. A lack of quality sleep can be a symptom of another issue. **The most important step is identifying why your sleep issues persist.** It is important that you are diagnosed and receive treatment, especially since failure to do so will often result in the worsening of both the poor sleep and the underlying condition. If you continue to experience sleeping after trying the above suggestions, please visit your doctor as soon as possible. Once at your doctor, fully describe your sleep issues, including frequency, severity and type of disruption (failure to fall asleep, failure to stay asleep or not feeling rested after sleep). Be sure to mention any pre-existing physical or mental health conditions, as this will aid in the diagnosis and treatment.



Sleep Disorders

There are numerous sleep disorders, many of which have overlapping symptoms. Identifying the correct disorder is crucial to ensuring the right treatment and support is provided. Some of the more common sleep disorders are discussed below.

Insomnia Disorder

Insomnia disorder is defined as difficulty falling or staying asleep, despite having adequate opportunities. Difficulties in sleep must occur at least 3 times a week over a period of 3 or more months. Insomnia disorder impairs daytime activities and can cause significant distress. Insomnia disorder is also only diagnosed if no other mental or physical health condition is identified as the primary cause. Approximately 13% of Canadians suffer from insomnia disorder, with a higher occurrence among females than males. Insomnia disorder also increases in severity over time, meaning an early diagnosis can reduce both the level of suffering and the extent of the treatment required.

Sleepwalking/talking/eating

Sleepwalking involves getting out of bed and appearing awake, albeit with a 'glassy-eyed' expression. Sleepwalkers often perform regular activities, though they may do so out of the proper context, such as dressing for work in the middle of the night. Sleepwalkers are at risk of accidentally harming themselves or others, especially if an attempt is made to wake or communicate with them.

Sleep talking is very common, affecting an estimated 60-65% of adults. Other than causing disruption to those sharing a bed, it can often be a benign condition. However, if episodes grow more frequent, first appear at an older age or are joined by other symptoms, such as daytime sleepiness or movement of limbs during sleep, it could be a symptom of another sleep disorder.

Sleep eating is a sleep-related eating disorder (SRED). It involves binge eating and drinking while being only partly awake. This behaviour is beyond their control, and they may retain only a partial memory or no memory at all of the act. A person can be at risk of poisoning themselves and of causing injury or damage in the act of making food, such as burning themselves or potentially starting a fire. This condition is more common in women and can be a side effect of medications, especially those used to treat other sleep problems or depression.

Nightmare Disorder

Nightmare Disorder involves frequently suffering nightmares to the extent it causes ongoing disruption to sleep, mood and ability to function during the day. Nightmares may also be a symptom of other issues, such as:

- A different sleep disorder
- A medical issue
- Substance issues
- Use of medication
- Mental health concerns, such as anxiety, depression or PTSD

Repeated occurrences of the same nightmare may also result from severe stress or traumatic events.

Night Terrors

While they share the same physical symptoms of nightmares, night terrors are different in several key ways. The sufferer will not wake up during a night terror or remember it afterwards. It is also risky to wake someone up during an episode, as they could be unresponsive or even cause harm to themselves or you. Although more common in younger life, they can occur in adults, especially those with a history of bipolar, depressive or anxiety disorders. Night terrors should be brought to the attention of your doctor if they:

- Occur 2 or more times a week
- Lead to you injuring yourself or others
- Cause ongoing disruption to your sleep
- Impact your personal or work life
- Occur during sleepwalking or talking episodes



Restless Leg Syndrome

Restless leg syndrome is a neurological condition causing sufferers to experience uncomfortable feelings and the strong urge to move their legs. The feeling this condition causes is difficult to describe, with sufferers using terms such as crawling, itchy, throbbing and even creepy. These feelings often intensify when sitting or lying down, and tend to occur more frequently during the evening, making it difficult to fall asleep and reducing the quality of sleep in sufferers.

Women are twice as likely as men to suffer from restless leg syndrome, and those with a family history of the condition are at a significantly greater risk as well. This condition also tends to go undiagnosed, as sufferers do not view it as a serious concern. If untreated, the ongoing loss of and disruption to sleep can be significant. Restless leg syndrome can usually be managed by a combination of lifestyle changes and medication.

Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is both common and very serious. Sufferers experience blocking of their airway multiple times during sleep limiting the amount of air reaching the lungs. This can cause the body to wake up multiple times during sleep, often without the sufferer being aware of it. The resulting disruption to sleep causes daytime fatigue, difficulty concentrating and even unintentional daytime sleep. Sufferers can also experience morning headaches, memory loss, irritability and decrease sexual desire. During sleep, they can exhibit loud or frequent snoring and make choking or gasping sounds.

The reduced oxygen your body receives can also cause other health issues, including high blood pressure and increased risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and depression. This makes it all the more important to consult your doctor if you exhibit any of these symptoms.

“For years people would always tell me that I snore loudly. I always thought it was just a funny quirk about myself. The not so funny part was that I was constantly tired, and I didn’t know how to explain it to people. As a teenager, I would sleep most of the day away but still feel exhausted. Even into my adult life, I would sleep for hours on end but never wake up feeling refreshed. It wasn’t until I met my mother-in-law who is a sleep therapist who told me that I might be experiencing sleep issues. After some time, I took a sleep test and consulted with a doctor who diagnosed me with severe sleep apnea. Now my life has completely changed for the better. Every night I use my CPAP machine which has made a world of a difference. I actually wake up feeling refreshed and can stay awake throughout the day! It is this combined with a daily nighttime routine, limited caffeine and alcohol before bed and meditation that helps me have a more positive sleep. I am so thankful for my wife and mother-in-law for helping my find the right path towards a more restful and healthier lifestyle.”

Mood Disorders

A mood disorder is a condition that causes persistent disruption to a sufferer’s moods. Not only can mood disorders cause sleep issues, but there is a growing understanding that the relationship is bi-directional, meaning poor quality of sleep can worsen or even initiate these conditions. This makes it even more important to seek treatment as soon as possible, otherwise, the sleep issues/mood disorder cycle will continue with the severity of both worsening over time. The connection between sleep and specific mood disorders is discussed below.

Major Depressive Disorder

Depression involves ongoing and persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness that cannot be fully attributed to a cause. Depression is a widely suffered condition, affecting an estimated 300 million people globally. Approximately three-quarters of those suffering from depression also show signs of insomnia. There is growing evidence that the resulting reduction of qual-



ity sleep further exacerbates depression, causing a feedback loop of ever-worsening conditions. However, the recognition of this bi-directional relationship also allows for additional treatments. In some cases, taking steps to address the lack of quality sleep can see improvements in the severity of depression being suffered.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

A subtype of depression is seasonal affective disorder. This condition affects sufferers when daylight hours are at their shortest or when living in locations where there is not a lot of sunshine (i.e., rainy or overcast places). In addition to the symptoms of depression, this disorder is also closely tied to the disruption of the internal body clock, causing sufferers to sleep too much or too little.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder cause periods of both high (mania) and lows (depression) moods. These changes in mood impact everyday life, including the ability to sleep. Sleep patterns change during an episode, with mania reducing the feeling of needing sleep and depression often causing excessive sleep. Changes to sleep patterns can also occur before an episode, indicating its coming onset. As with other mood disorders, there is a bi-directional relationship between bipolar and sleep issues, with a lack of quality sleep-inducing or worsening manic and depressive episodes. This also means that, in some cases, treating sleep issues can help to reduce the impact of bipolar disorder.

Other Mental Illnesses

Other types of mental illnesses may affect your sleep. Three of the most common are: anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Each of these require treatment to help you sleep.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders affect the sufferer by creating excessive fear and worry. This impacts everyday living, as well as increasing the risks of multiple health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. There are multiple types of anxiety disorder, including general anxiety, social anxiety, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Sufferers often experience sleep issues. For example, they may experience worry and fear causing the mind to race with thoughts thereby reducing the chances of falling asleep. The subsequent lack of sleep can also become a cause of anxiety, further worsening the situation and causing a feedback loop between the conditions and the symptoms. Research has also indicated that persistent sleep issues can activate anxiety disorders in those already at risk for them.

Substance Use Disorders

The term “substance use” refers to the use of substances such as alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, inhalants and solvents. A substance use disorder exists when using alcohol or other drugs causes harm to you or to others. Substance use disorders are on a spectrum but can lead to addiction, which in turn can range from mild to severe. Many substances have mood-altering properties (i.e., they change how you feel) that often change or alter sleep. Using substances without medical guidance to improve your sleep can also result in further negative outcomes.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that comes from exposure either directly or indirectly to trauma. Trauma can be any event in which there was a threat of harm or death. If you have PTSD, you may also struggle to sleep. Many people with PTSD are hypervigilant - meaning they are constantly on edge and ready to react to any threat. This makes it very hard to relax and go to sleep, due to the constant fear that something awful is about to happen and you need to be ready. For some people, this can result in extreme behaviours such as sitting in a chair all night or repeatedly waking up to check the locks on doors or windows. Sufferers of PTSD may also experience nightmares or night terrors. This is because the brain may be trying to resolve or figure out a trauma during sleep. If you have been exposed or think you have been exposed to trauma, it is important to get help from a mental health professional such as a counsellor or psychologist.



Treatments

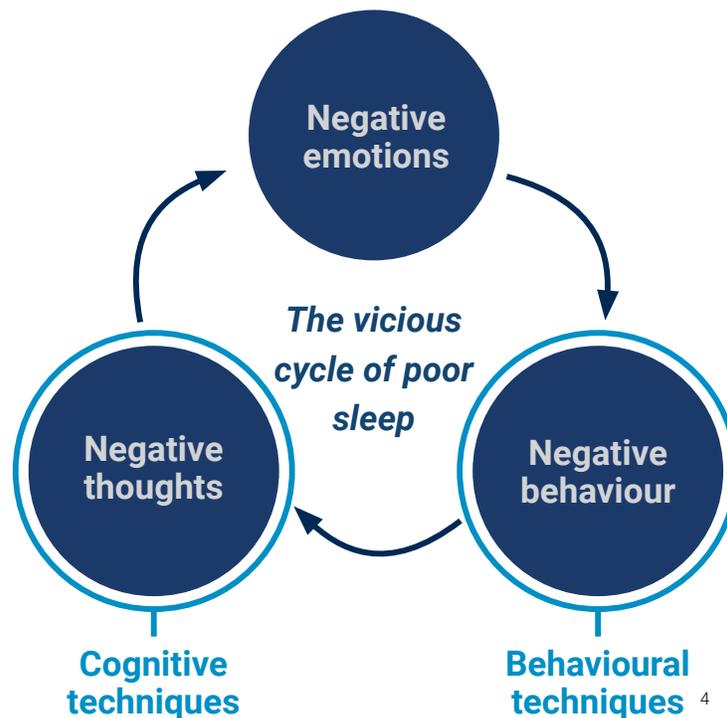
It is important to know that **all of the above conditions can be treated**. Treatment may involve counselling, medication or other methods such as the use of specific relaxation techniques designed to promote sleep. It could involve any combination of the three or something else entirely. However, by bringing your concerns and symptoms to your doctor, you are on the path to getting the specific assistance you need. Some of the common treatments are discussed below.

“I recall speaking with my wife one day about how I had spent the previous four months experiencing major sleep problems. During this period some nights I would get 1-3 hours sleep. My wife urged me to speak to the Doctor about what was going on which I did. I left the Doctors office that day understanding more what sleep deprivation can impact my health. I also received a prescription for sleep medication. That night was the first night in many months I actually slept the full night. That was the start of me addressing the issue head on.”

Counselling - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

The most common and helpful treatment for sleep-related problems or disorders is counselling. While there are various types of counselling, the most common type of therapy used is called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

CBT has been used for many years. There is also a special form of CBT called CBT-I that is specially designed for people who have insomnia or are unable to get the amount of sleep they need to wake up feeling rested and refreshed. CBT-I focuses on exploring the connection between the way we think, the things we do, and how we sleep. During treatment, a trained CBT-I provider will help you to identify thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are contributing to the symptoms of insomnia.



4 Sleepio. (2020). CTB for insomnia – the science behind Sleepio.



CBT involves two main components:

Cognitive therapy

Teaches you to recognize and change negative beliefs and thoughts (cognitions) that contribute to your sleep problems. This includes: identifying your negative thoughts, challenging your negative thoughts, and replacing negative thoughts with realistic thoughts.

Behavioural therapy

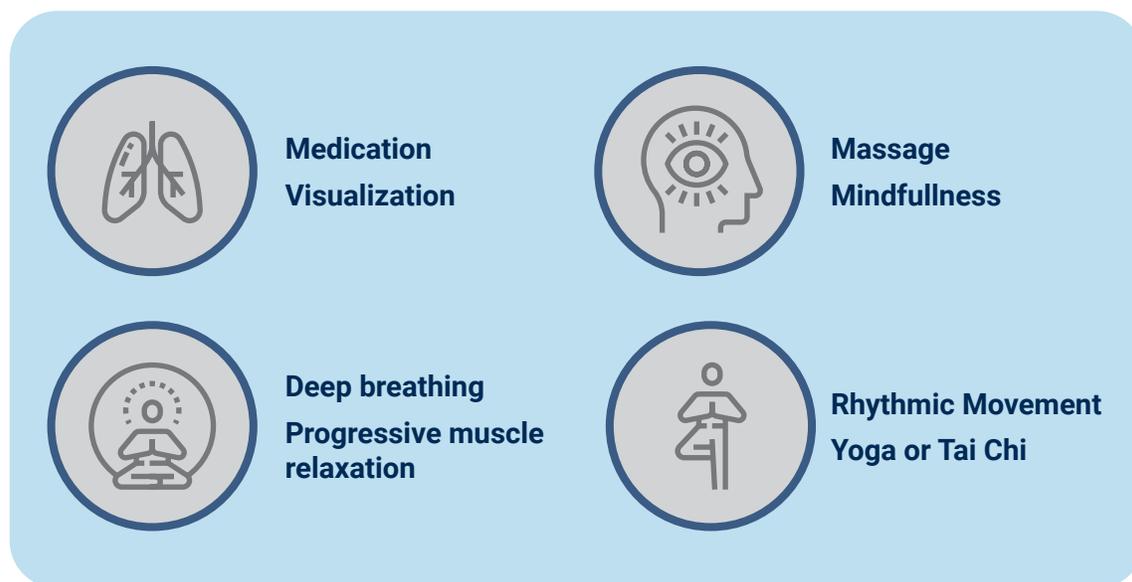
Teaches you how to avoid behaviours that keep you awake at night and replace them with better sleep habits. Some of the behavioural strategies you may be taught include: sleep restriction therapy, recognizing negative stimuli that are impacting sleep, sleep hygiene, remaining awake, and relaxation training.

Many CBT treatment programs for insomnia report significant improvement in sleep patterns after between 5 and 8 weekly sessions. CBT can be a very effective and achievable way to begin to address sleep problems.

CBT may be conducted individually, in a group of people with similar sleeping problems, or even online. Since the causes and symptoms of sleep disorders vary considerably, CBT should always be tailored to your specific needs.

Relaxation Techniques

There are many different types of relaxation techniques that may be helpful to your sleeping, such as:



Medication

Medications can play an important role in the treatment of sleep-related problems and disorders. There is a wide range of medications which would be determined by the conditions being suffered and personal medical history, **there will be times when medications may be helpful**. As this guide shows, if you do not get enough quality sleep, there are significant short and long-term consequences. Medications can be used to provide relief both in the short-term or long-term.

As with all treatments, you need to talk to your doctor who will detail the possible treatments for you. Your doctor will be able to inform you of the benefits, impact, and possible side effects to sleeping medications, helping you to determine the best medication for your specific situation.



Summary

Sleep is an often-underestimated component of physical and mental health. It both affects and is affected by our entire well-being. Sleep is a potential source **and** symptom of multiple other issues we may be facing. You are not alone in facing these concerns; we know millions of Canadians face the same struggles every day.

If you recognize yourself in the issues described in this guide, or have any reason at all to believe you are not getting enough quality sleep, please contact a health care professional and start the journey towards regular, quality sleep. By understanding how much sleep we need, and taking necessary steps when we are not meeting that need, we enhance all other areas of our physical, mental and emotional lives.

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What Better Sleep Feels Like: A Guide to Maintaining Wellness



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