



Insomnia

What is insomnia?



Almost everyone has trouble sleeping sometimes. Insomnia means you have regular disrupted sleep that includes:

- Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early—even when you have enough time to sleep at night.
- Fatigue, trouble concentrating, or mood changes that affect your daytime routines.

The amount of sleep needed varies for each person. How you feel counts more than how long you've slept. If you feel good and rested, you're getting enough sleep.

What causes insomnia?



Insomnia can be caused by many things, including:

- Sleep habits
- Depression, anxiety, or stress
- Medications (prescription and over-the-counter)
- Caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco use before bedtime
- Hormonal changes due to pregnancy or perimenopause
- Chronic pain



Can't sleep? What you can do

For the next 3 to 4 weeks, try these tips to help you sleep better:

- Go to bed and wake up around the same time each day, even on weekends.
- Try to relax in the evening, especially the hour before bedtime. Set aside time earlier to deal with family conflict or other problems.
- Get out of bed and do something relaxing in dim lighting until you feel tired, if you can't fall asleep within 30 minutes.
- Use your bedroom for sleep and sex—not for working, watching TV, or other activities.
- Avoid napping. If you must nap during the day, nap at least 4 hours before your bedtime and no longer than 20 minutes.
- Make sure your bedding and night clothes are comfortable—and your room is quiet, dark, and cool.
- Avoid caffeine (especially after 12 noon), alcohol, and tobacco. Talk with your doctor if your medicine keeps you awake.
- Drink less fluid in the evening to avoid waking up to go to the bathroom.
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days, but do so 3 hours before bedtime. Regular exercise will help you get deep sleep.
- Skip bedtime snacks or have only a light snack 1 to 2 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid using a computer, phone, or other devices 1 to 2 hours before bedtime. The light from these screens can affect your ability to fall asleep.



How is insomnia treated?

The best long-term treatment for insomnia is cognitive (thought) behavioral (action) therapy (CBT). CBT teaches you to change:

- Thoughts that interfere with sleep, such as, “If I don’t get to sleep soon, I won’t be able to work, take care of my mother, or drive for the field trip tomorrow.” CBT helps you focus on relaxing thoughts so your body slows down to sleep.
- Sleep behaviors. You may be in bed awake for long periods of time. CBT helps you reassociate the bed and bedroom with relaxation and drowsiness.

CBT may include relaxation training to stop racing thoughts and reduce anxiety. You can sign up for classes in our Health Education Department. You don’t need a referral from your doctor.

What about medication?

Sleep medications may help temporarily, but their effect wears off over time. They also don’t treat the underlying causes of insomnia, can be habit forming, and have other side effects, which may be more severe in people over age 65. If you use sleeping pills, our sleep medicine

specialists recommend that you gradually stop regular use of these medications under your doctor’s supervision.

Do supplements work?

Studies show melatonin and other supplements can improve aspects of sleep. However, some over-the-counter remedies may have side effects. If you’re taking this or any other herbal remedies, tell your doctor or other health professional.

When should you call Kaiser Permanente?

Improving your sleep habits takes time. It may take several weeks before you notice a difference. Call your doctor if you:

- Think your insomnia is caused by another medical condition, such as chronic pain, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, anxiety, or depression.
- Have had insomnia for 3 months or more and it hasn’t improved.
- Have questions about insomnia medicines.



Additional resources

For more health information, tools, and other resources:

- Search kp.org/mydoctor
- Visit your local Health Education Department

Mobile apps:

- CBT-i Coach available at the App Store and Google Play.

Books:

- *Say Good Night to Insomnia*, by Greg Jacobs, PhD

Some health concerns, including insomnia, can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are being hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](https://www.ndvh.org).