

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Proposed publication date: Mar. 1, 2021

Content provided by: Alberta Health Services, myhealth.alberta.ca

Improving your sleep

Everyone has a "bad night" once in a while. Dogs barking, the wind howling, or overeating may make it hard to sleep. It is estimated that 35 per cent of adults have occasional sleep problems, which can have many causes.

The medical term for trouble falling asleep or staying asleep is insomnia. Insomnia can include:

- Trouble getting to sleep (taking more than 45 minutes to fall asleep).
- Frequent awakenings with inability to fall back to sleep.
- Early morning awakening.
- Feeling very tired after a night of sleep.

Insomnia usually is not a problem unless it makes you feel tired during the day. If you are less sleepy at night or wake up early but still feel rested and alert, there usually is little need to worry. Occasional insomnia may be caused by noise, extreme temperatures, jet lag, changes in your sleep environment, or a change in your sleep pattern, such as shift work. Insomnia may also be caused by temporary or situational life stresses, such as a traumatic event or an impending deadline. Your insomnia is likely to disappear when the cause of your sleep problem goes away. Short-term insomnia may last from a few nights to a few weeks.

Long-term insomnia, which may last months or even years, may be caused by:

- Advancing age. Insomnia occurs more frequently in adults older than age 60.
- Mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression or mania.
- Medicines. Many prescription and non-prescription medicines can cause sleep problems.
- Chronic pain, which often develops after a major injury or illness.
- Other problems that interrupt your sleep, such as asthma, coronary artery disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or menopause.
- Alcohol and illegal drug use or withdrawal.
- Cigarettes and other tobacco use.

- Drinking or eating foods that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea, chocolate or soft drinks.

Sleep apnea

Sleep apnea refers to repeated episodes of not breathing during sleep for at least 10 seconds (apneic episodes). It usually is caused by a blockage in the nose, mouth, or throat (upper airways). People who have sleep apnea usually snore loudly and are very tired during the day. It can affect children and adults.

Narcolepsy

Narcolepsy is a sleep disorder that has distinct symptoms, including:

- Sudden sleep attacks, which may occur during any type of activity at any time of day. You may fall asleep while engaged in an activity such as eating dinner, driving the car, or carrying on a conversation. These sleep attacks can occur several times a day and may last from a few minutes to several hours.
- Sudden, brief periods of muscle weakness while you are awake (cataplexy).
- Hallucinations just before a sleep attack.
- Brief loss of the ability to move when you are falling asleep or just waking up (sleep paralysis).

While almost everyone experiences daytime sleepiness from time to time, it can have serious consequences such as motor vehicle accidents, poor work or school performance, and work-related accidents.

Sleep problems may be a symptom of a medical or mental health problem. If you are having sleep issues, see your doctor or call Health Link at 811 to speak with a registered nurse.