

Getting Quality Sleep

Tips to help reduce chronic pain

Being in pain can make sleeping harder, and sleeping poorly may make your pain worse. Getting quality sleep may improve your pain. Try some or all of these tips to help you sleep better, and check them off as you go.

During the Day

- Get up at the same time 7 days a week.** This will help your body feel tired at the same time each night.
- Avoid taking naps** during the day, or limit them to 30 minutes. Consider setting an alarm if you do nap.
- Be physically active during the day.** Staying active during the day can help you sleep better at night.
- Set boundaries with people (and pets) that may interfere with your sleep.** Tell your partner, roommate, or children exactly what they can do (or not do) to help you sleep well.
- Keep a clean bed.** Wash your sheets and change your pillowcases on a regular basis.



Waking up at the same time every morning can help you fall asleep more easily at night.

In the Evening

- Avoid alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine in the evening.** Many people sleep better when they also avoid caffeine in the afternoon.
- Do not eat a heavy meal.**
- Do not exercise.**

Before You Go to Bed

- Turn the lights down.** Turn off the computer, TV, and other electronic devices, and dim the lights.
- Avoid stimulating activities,** such as playing games or having a difficult talk with someone.
- Keep a sleep routine.** Get ready for bed in the same way each night by washing up and changing your clothes.

- Set a bed time.** Try to go to sleep around the same time each night.
- Make sure the bedroom is comfortable.** Go to bed clean, make sure it is quiet, and keep the temperature comfortable. Consider not having pets in the bed, since they affect the temperature, space, and how clean the bed is.
- Make your bedroom dark.** Even small amounts of light can disrupt sleep. Consider using a sleep mask and covering lights from electronics. Use heavy curtains.

While in Bed

- Use your bed for sleep and intimacy only.** This way your body and mind will learn to expect only to relax in bed.
- If you are in bed and cannot sleep, get out of bed and do something relaxing.** Avoid tossing and turning in bed by standing in the dark next to your bed until your body feels tired, repeating a relaxing thought (like “my only job is to sleep”). You may choose to read or do a quiet and relaxing activity. Avoid bright lights (from computer, TV, etc.), eating, and any activity that gets your mind thinking. Get back into bed after a little while. If you do not fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and continue with a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy.
- If you snore, gasp for air while sleeping, or wake up with a headache, tell your primary health care provider.** You may have *sleep apnea*. This condition is diagnosed through a sleep study. It can be treated in many ways, most often by using a *continuous positive airway pressure* (CPAP) machine.
- Do not be discouraged if your sleep does not improve right away.** It often takes some time and consistent use of all of these tips to start sleeping better.

For More Help

If you have tried many of the ideas in this handout for several weeks and feel you are still not getting quality sleep, please talk with your primary health care provider about your sleep patterns and habits.

Your health care provider may refer you to a sleep clinic for more help. A sleep clinic can assess whether you have a sleep disorder, such as *sleep apnea* (pauses in breathing or shallow breathing during sleep).

Cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia might also be helpful. This is a type of therapy that focuses on changing behaviors to improve a problem. It can help you with sleep problems such as having a hard time falling asleep or waking up in the middle of the night and not being able to get back to sleep easily.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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