

SLEEP AND MEDICAL PROBLEMS

Quick Facts:

Poor sleep is often linked to other health problems. The physical and emotional impact of a medical illness can cause or worsen sleep problems. The cause and severity of sleep problems can vary widely.

KEY POINTS:

- **Sleep problems may be caused by a variety of common medical illnesses and treatments.**
- **Common medical problems that can cause poor sleep include heart and kidney disease, breathing problems, cancer and diabetes.**
- **Medication side effects can cause unwanted drowsiness, insomnia and other sleep problems.**
- **Good sleep habits can improve your sleep when you have a medical illness.**
- **It is important to talk with your doctor about any ongoing sleep problems.**



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit www.sleepeducation.org

Am I At Risk:

You may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep if you have pain, limited movement or other symptoms from a medical problem. You tend to have more chronic health problems as you age. As a result, poor sleep due to a medical problem is most common in older adults.

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Common medical problems that can cause poor sleep include:

- Heartburn
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Nighttime urination
- Thyroid disease
- Breathing problems
- Muscle and bone disorders

Poor sleep can be an unwanted side effect of over-the-counter drugs. For example, common cold and flu medicine can cause unwanted drowsiness or make it hard to fall sleep.

Prescription drugs are important to treat medical problems. But some drugs can disrupt your sleep too. Medications that can cause sleep problems or daytime drowsiness include those used to treat these medical problems:

- Heart disease and high blood pressure
- Breathing problems
- Cough, cold, flu and allergies
- Thyroid disease
- Depression and anxiety
- Pain

Sleep problems may arise during a hospital stay. Noise, light, extreme temperatures and interruptions can disrupt your sleep in the hospital. These sleep problems may continue after you return home.

TIPS:

Good sleep habits can help you sleep better. Tips to help you sleep with a medical problem include:

- Obtain and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Exercise each day at a pace that feels comfortable.
- Avoid spicy foods at bedtime to reduce heartburn.
- Avoid going to bed hungry or too full.
- Manage your blood sugar levels to avoid diabetes symptoms during sleep.
- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening.
- Follow a soothing bedtime routine that helps you relax.
- Limit water and other fluids before bedtime to prevent extra nighttime trips to the bathroom.
- Take a non-narcotic pain reliever before bedtime to help ease pain.
- Reduce breathing problems by using extra pillows to elevate your upper body during sleep.
- Set aside a period of time each day to think about any concerns or worries.

Next Steps:

- Talk to your doctor about any ongoing sleep problems.
- Your doctors will help find and treat any underlying causes of your sleep problem.
- Your doctor may schedule you for a sleep study if you have symptoms of a sleep disorder such as sleep apnea.
- Discuss all of your medications and herbal supplements with your your doctor. Ask about the sleep-related side effects of your medications. Your doctor may adjust your medication timing and dose to help improve your sleep.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your doctor.



Sample Questions:

Why do I feel tired all the time?

What is a CPAP machine and how can it help me?