



# Sleep-Wake Disorders

Sleep-wake disorders are associated with sleep-wake complaints of dissatisfaction regarding the quality, timing, and amount of sleep, resulting daytime distress and impairment. Sleep-wake disorders are often linked to both physical and emotional problems. They may be accompanied with depression, anxiety, and cognitive changes. Persistent sleep disturbances are the risk factors for the subsequent development of mental illness and substance use disorders.



Sleep is a basic need and is critical to your health. There are two types of sleep. They occur in a pattern of three-to-five cycles:

**Rapid eye movement (REM) –  
when most dreaming occurs**



**Non rapid eye movement (NREM) –  
three phases including the deepest sleep**



Our body typically works on a 24-hour cycle. The time to sleep is also crucial. How much sleep we need varies from person to person. According to the National Sleep Foundation, the recommended sleep hours for young adults and adults are 7 to 9 hours.

## Tips for better sleep quality



Your arrangement for the day and evening time can have a major impact on your sleep quality. Here are some tips for your good sleep.

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule. Get up at the same time even on holidays.
- Set a bedtime that is early enough for 7 hours of sleep.
- Don't go to bed unless you are sleepy. Associate bed with sleep.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Make your bedroom dim-lightened, quiet and comfortable at a cool temperature.
- Power off the electronic devices at least 30 minutes before sleep.
- Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy diet.
- Don't bring problems to bed. Write down your thoughts before bedtime.
- Reduce irregular or long daytime naps.
- Don't eat a lot before bedtime. Eat light snack instead.
- Avoid caffeine or alcohol in the late afternoon or evening.

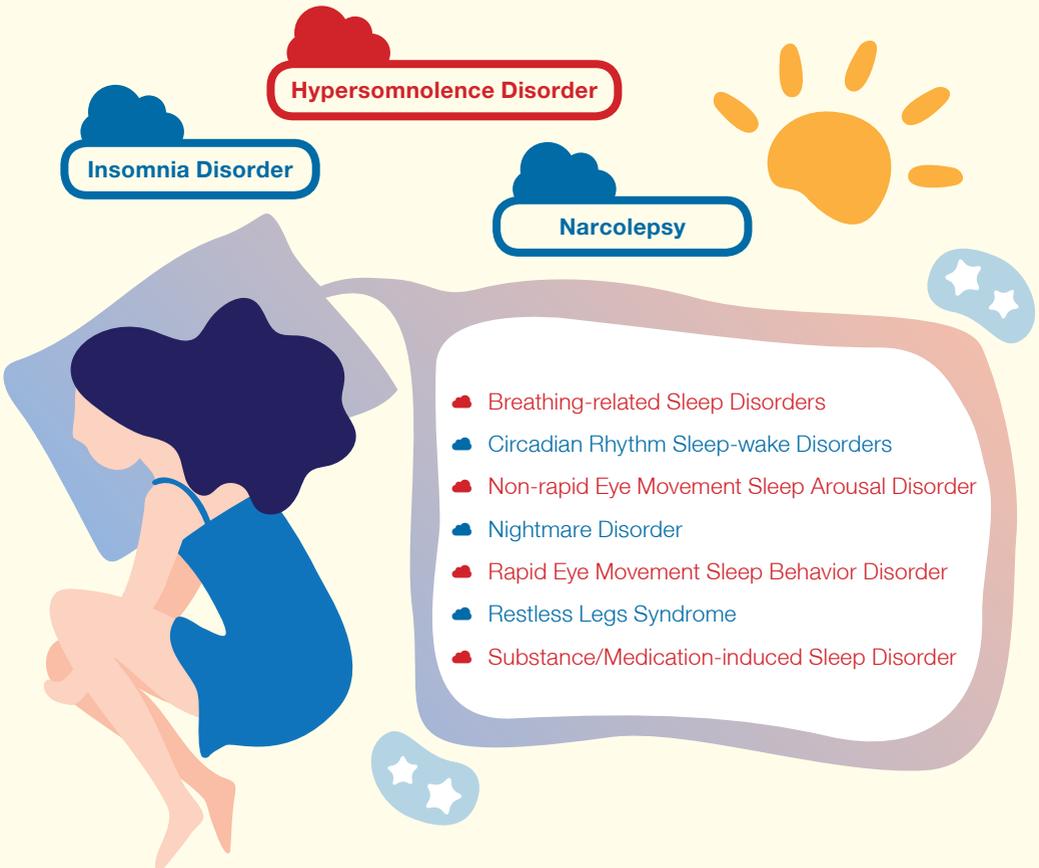
# What happens if I don't have enough sleep?

Sleep helps your mental and emotional functioning. Not getting enough sleep or poor sleep quality is potentially harmful. Common problems are tiredness and low energy, irritability and poor concentration. The ability to make decisions and mood stability can also be influenced. Sleep problems can cause depression or anxiety, and vice versa.

Lack of sleep and too much sleep are linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and many other illnesses. Sleep disturbances can also be a warning symptom for congestive heart failure, osteoarthritis and Parkinson's disease.

About one third of adults report sleep problems as in Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's research and similar results were found among other studies.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), there are ten types of sleep-wake disorders. We are here to highlight three of them which are more commonly heard among general public.





## Insomnia Disorder

People with insomnia display a dissatisfaction with sleep quantity or quality with complaints of difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep. The sleep complaints are accompanied by significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The sleep disturbance may occur during another mental disorder or medical condition. It may occur independently, at any time during life.

## Hypersomnolence Disorder

People with hypersomnolence disorder fall asleep easily and can sleep for a long time (over 9 hours), but still not feeling rested. They may have difficulty waking up in the morning, sometimes appearing confused or combative while trying to wake up. This prolonged impairment of alertness at the sleep-wake transition is often referred to as sleep inertia or sleep drunkenness. During the sleep inertia period, in addition to being confused and having difficulty in alertness, there may be a decline in motor complexity, odd behaviors, memory deficits, disorientation of reality, and feelings of grogginess. The persistent need for sleep can sometimes cause automatic behavior, such as driving that they cannot recall.

## Narcolepsy

People with narcolepsy is characterized by recurrent irresistible daytime naps, which could be described as “sleep attacks”. Narcolepsy also causes sudden loss of bilateral muscle tone which is precipitated by emotions, such as laughing and joking. During the sudden loss of muscle tone, people may experience head bobbing, jaw dropping, slurred speech, dropping eyelids or complete falls, but the consciousness still remains. Some people with narcolepsy experience vivid hallucination before falling asleep or after waking up. Nightmares, vivid dreaming, nocturnal eating and sleep paralysis (awake but unable to move) are also common in people with narcolepsy.

# What are the treatment of sleep-wake disorders?



Many people who suffer from sleep-wake disorders can resume a normal life with proper treatment. The treatment will depend on the type and severity of disorder, and the individual's particular circumstances.

Psychotherapy can help to understand and aware about the disorder, the risk factors, and can help to manage the thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Common treatment approaches include cognitive therapy, stimulus control, sleep restriction, and progressive muscle relaxation.

There are some medications available to reduce the symptoms or to treat sleep-wake disorders. A common approach is to combine medications with behavioral interventions, in order to promote regular sleep. Sleeping tablets should only be used for a short period, which is less than 2 weeks for sleep regulation. Antidepressant tablets can be helpful in some cases.

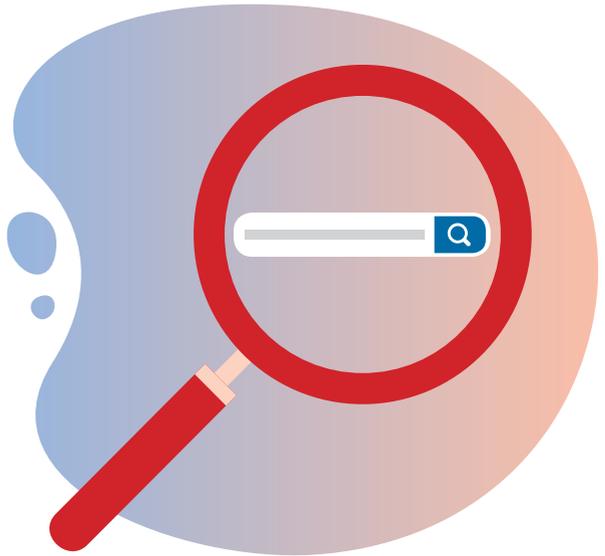
Sometimes, sleeping remedies can be assessed without the need of a prescription. We highly recommend you to consult a doctor before proper use. The medicines usually have a side effect on your body and can be addictive if you take them for a long time. Let your doctor know about any alternative medicines or supplements if you are taking.

## Support and Self-help

Sleep-wake disorders can significantly disrupt the lives of the affected person and their relationships with the loved ones. In addition to seeking professional treatment proactively, family support is helpful for the person's recovery, especially on medical compliance, cognitive adjustment and behavioral restrictions.

Self-care and coping strategies are important to improve sleep problems. For instance, we may maintain regular physical exercises, avoid drug and alcohol, practise relaxation before bedtime, as well as adopt mind and body approaches like mindfulness meditation and yoga.





## References

### American Psychiatric Association

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/sleep-disorders>

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/index.html>

### Royal College of Psychiatrists

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/sleeping-well>

## Professional Help-seeking

The University provides counseling services for undergraduate and postgraduate students. You may check out Counselors' profiles on our webpage and make an online appointment with us. Three weeks' advance reservation is allowed. All personal information and details shared and discussed in counseling or therapy sessions are strictly confidential.

### Counseling and Wellness Center

🏠 Room 5003 (via lift 3) ☎ (852) 2358 6696  
🌐 <http://counsel.ust.hk> ✉ [counsel@ust.hk](mailto:counsel@ust.hk)

24/7 HEARing ☎ (852) 8208 2688

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