

Treatment for sleep problems

- **Insomnia** – the first step is to work out whether there's an underlying cause and then attend to it. Cognitive behavioural therapy for people with insomnia can help change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that may contribute to insomnia. Another approach, called sleep restriction, limits the amount of time spent in bed.
- **Obstructive sleep apnoea** – treatment includes weight loss, cutting down on alcohol, the use of dental appliances such as mouthguards, and continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines.
- **Snoring** – losing weight, cutting down on alcohol and quitting smoking can help, as can sleeping on your side. There are special devices you can use in your nose or mouth to reduce snoring.
- **Sleep deprivation** – the main treatment is to increase total sleep time by addressing the cause of the sleep deprivation. Even if shift work is the cause, there are things you can do to reduce sleep deprivation.
- **Restless legs syndrome** – there are several medicines that can help.

Your doctor can help you work out what's causing your sleep problem(s) and which treatments are best for you.



A note on sleeping medication

Sleeping tablets or medicines are not used often because they can cause harm. Ongoing use can lead to developing a dependency on them, as well as an increased risk of falls, confusion, dementia and difficulties with driving.

Taking sleeping tablets for more than a few nights in a row can also make sleeping problems worse.

If you're taking sleeping medication regularly, ask your doctor to help you stop. You may need to stop gradually over several weeks to months.



Your health and your whānau's health is important



Information supplied by the Health Navigator Charitable Trust, healthnavigator.org.nz. Health Navigator is a not-for-profit resource for the public and health professionals wanting trusted New Zealand health information. You can find out more about common sleep problems on the website.



COMMON SLEEP PROBLEMS

SLEEP HEALTH

Having trouble sleeping?



Get information on sleep at:
hn.org.nz/sleep



What are common sleep problems?

Nearly everyone has trouble getting to sleep from time to time but, for some people, this can be a regular ongoing problem.

Not only can it make you feel tired, but it can really affect your day to day functioning and health. Learning how to manage sleep problems can greatly improve your quality of life.

Insomnia – you have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep for long enough.

Obstructive sleep apnoea – you stop breathing while you're asleep.

Snoring – you make a snorting or rattling noise when you breathe during sleep.

Sleep deprivation – you don't get enough sleep or enough good quality sleep, or you sleep at the wrong time (eg, daytime instead of night-time).

Restless legs syndrome – you have a really strong urge to move your legs.

How do I know if I have a sleep problem?

If you often have trouble getting to sleep or if you often wake during the night, you may not be getting enough sleep. Adults need seven to nine hours of sleep a night.

You may have a sleep problem if you often:

- have trouble getting to sleep
- wake during the night
- wake too early
- don't feel refreshed when you wake
- have morning headaches
- sleep at the wrong time
- feel sleepy during the day
- feel irritable
- have poor concentration.



Not getting enough sleep, or getting poor-quality sleep, increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes. That means it's important to take steps to get good quality sleep.

Sleep tips



Set your body clock – go to bed and get up at the same time each day, including weekends.

Get up if you can't sleep – if you can't sleep after 20 minutes or so, get up and do something boring until you feel tired, then try again. Don't lie in bed getting frustrated.

Wind down at bedtime – have an hour of quiet time before bed: switch off your electronic device, read, have a bath or listen to music.

Avoid stimulants – within two to three hours of bedtime don't smoke, drink alcohol or caffeinated drinks, eat a heavy meal or do energetic exercise.

Make your bedroom suitable for sleep – keep it cool, dark and quiet and use it only for sleep and sex.

Avoid naps – don't sleep during the day but go to bed earlier in the evening.

Be active in the day – take regular daytime exercise and get outside early to help set your body clock for a good night's sleep.

Use an app – try an app or online sleep programme. Visit hn.org.nz/sleepapps for reviews.

