

# ***Sleep and Depression - What's the Connection?***

Sleep is essential for a person's physical and mental health. While you're sleeping, your body and brain work hard to repair and restore themselves. Research shows that those who are chronically sleep deprived have a higher risk for health problems such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.

Lack of sleep is also a risk factor for and a symptom of depression. People who suffer from sleep problems, especially insomnia (a problem falling or staying asleep), are at higher risk for depression. Although not every person who has insomnia develops depression, this sleep problem is common among those who are depressed.

A small percentage of people with depression have problems with oversleeping, or getting too much sleep. Oversleeping, just like lack of sleep, is associated with health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. It can also worsen depression.

## **How Much is Enough?**

Sleep needs vary among individuals. And although there's no magic number of hours that adults need to sleep, most health experts believe that you should get from seven to nine hours of sleep per night. You might feel fine getting a little more or a little less from time to time, but chronic sleep problems—either lack of sleep or oversleeping—can result in health and safety issues.

## **Sleep Aids**

Often, treatment of depression with psychotherapy, exercise, improved diet, and antidepressant medications helps with sleeping problems. But sometimes insomnia persists. If this happens, talk to your doctor about your sleep issues. You may be asked to keep a sleep diary or undergo testing to look for underlying causes for the sleep disturbance. Prescription sleep aids may be used for short periods of time to help break the cycle of insomnia, but it is best to avoid long-term use of them because they can lead to dependence and rebound insomnia. Most physicians agree that because of the risks of side effects and the possibility of dependency, these medications should not be used for long periods of time.

## **Tips for Better Sleep**

If you're depressed and suffer from sleep problems, here are some things you can do to get better sleep:

Go to bed and wake up at approximately the same time every day, even on weekends.

Set the scene with a comfortable bedroom. Make sure your pillows and mattress are not too soft or hard. Get blinds or curtains that darken the room, and make sure the temperature is cool.

Establish a sleep routine. Begin to prepare for sleep an hour before bedtime by listening to relaxing music or taking a bath. Do this nightly.

Avoid stimulating activities, such as television, video games, computer work, or heavy reading an hour before bedtime. And don't exercise, drink caffeine, or smoke close to bedtime.

Avoid food and alcohol for at least two to three hours before bedtime.

Exercise regularly, but avoid working out in the late evening.

#### What the Expert Says

**“Getting good sleep is a major key in the treatment of depression,” says Howard Belkin, M.D., a psychiatrist on staff at William Beaumont Hospital in Michigan.**

**“Many people who are depressed have difficulty with early morning awakening; they’re up at 2 or 3 AM worrying about things.”**

For those who have sleep-maintenance insomnia, Belkin prescribes sleep aids for three to four nights in a row to break the wakefulness cycle, and this is repeated periodically as needed. Although this works for most, Belkin says, “there are a few people who need to be on sleep inducing medications under a doctor’s care on a long-term basis.”

<http://www.helpfordepression.com/article/lifestyle-changes/healthy-sleep-habits>