

Sleep problems

The Health Column

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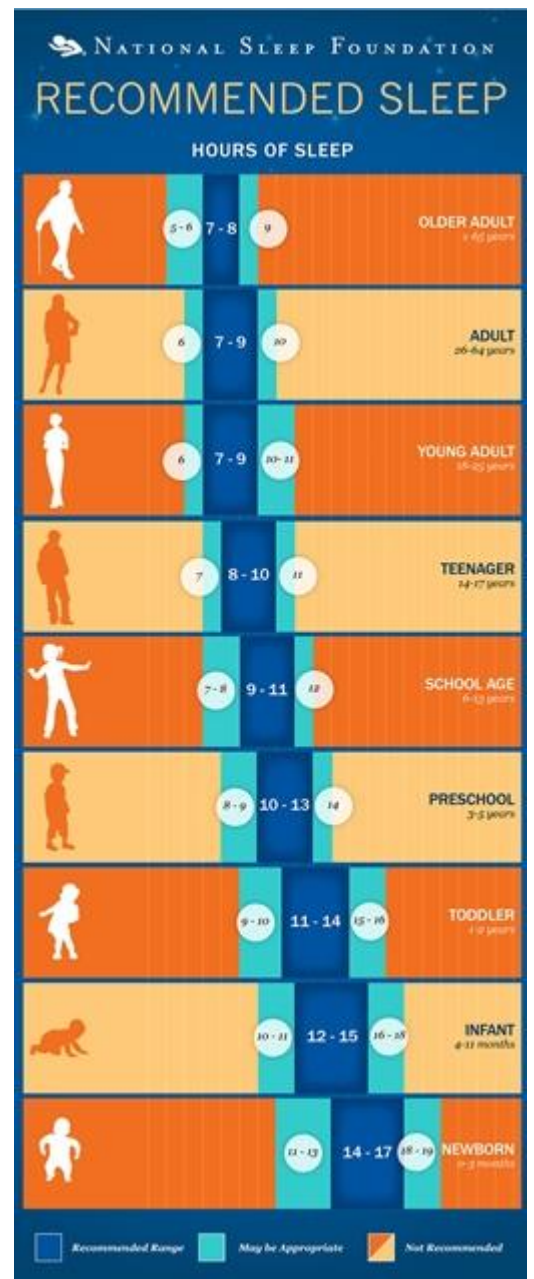
Everyone's need for sleep varies. The amount of sleep we need depends on our age, lifestyle, diet, personality and environment. Generally, we sleep less as we get older and our sleep tends to be more broken. Newborn babies tend to sleep for around 16 hours out of every 24, while adults average eight hours and the elderly sleep a little less.

Sometimes it is difficult to get a good night's sleep. You might be finding it hard to go to sleep, be restless during sleep, waking up during the night or very early in the morning, and not be able to get back to sleep. Perhaps you are not feeling refreshed from sleep, feeling tired, irritable, anxious or depressed, or finding it difficult to concentrate, remember things and make decisions. These may be all signs that you have a sleeping problem.

Common sleep problems include:

- insomnia – difficulty getting to or staying asleep, or not feeling refreshed after sleep
- sleep apnoea – stopping breathing for short periods of time while sleeping
- restless legs – moving the legs while lying down
- sleep behaviour disorders - such as sleepwalking and night terrors.

Insomnia is the most common sleep problem. The causes of insomnia can often be identified and treated or fixed. Other sleeping problems, like sleep apnoea, require treatment in a sleep disorder clinic. Snoring may be harmless or it can be a sign of an underlying condition such as sleep apnoea. If you are concerned, worried or anxious about your sleep health, talk to your doctor or local pharmacist. Sleeping problems should be investigated.



Insomnia can often be improved by having a supportive sleep environment. Most people sleep best in darkened, quiet rooms with fresh air, and on comfortable and supportive mattresses and pillows. A poor sleeping environment can disturb sleep. Avoid using electronic devices, such as mobile phones and computers immediately before sleeping, as they can affect the body's ability to relax before sleep. Pain or discomfort can also cause insomnia and should be investigated.

Sleep can also be affected by your lifestyle choices. To improve your sleep health, try:

- losing weight
- relaxation techniques (e.g. meditation)
- regular exercise,
- consuming less alcohol and caffeine.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination and can provide a range of products, medicines, services and advice to support healthy sleep habits. These include:

- sleeping aids, such as those to relieve snoring
- prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines
- medicine advice, including how medicines affect sleep
- healthy lifestyle tips and advice to improve the quality and quantity of sleep
- services to help you lose weight
- services for sleep disorders (e.g. sleep apnoea).

Look out for the posters for Sleep Awareness Week in Australia (4–10 July). During Sleep Awareness Week this year, sleep health foundation will be raising awareness of the common sleep disorder, obstructive sleep apnea or OSA and the benefits of treatment. Our key message is '**Don't ignore the (gasp) snore! See you GP now**'. Remember, we need sleep to refresh the mind and repair the body. Sleep is vital for our health.

For more information, you can get a Self Care Fact Card on *Sleep problems* from pharmacies that provide the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's (PSA) Self Care health information.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location, phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.

References:

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www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/sleep-awareness-week/about-sleep-awareness-week.html