



# Patient education: Daytime sleepiness (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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## What is daytime sleepiness?

Daytime sleepiness is feeling sleepy during the daylight hours, when most people are awake and alert.

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## What causes daytime sleepiness?

Daytime sleepiness can be caused by:

- Poor sleep habits – For example, not having enough time to sleep at night or not having a regular sleep schedule.
- A sleep disorder, such as:
  - Sleep apnea – People with this condition stop breathing for short periods during sleep.
  - Narcolepsy – People with this condition are very sleepy in the daytime and sometimes fall asleep suddenly during normal activities.
  - Insomnia – People with this condition have trouble falling or staying asleep.
- A medical problem, such as:
  - Hypothyroidism – This is the medical term for when a person does not make enough thyroid hormone. This hormone controls how your body uses and stores energy.
  - Depression – People with this condition feel sad or down a lot of the time. They often also have trouble working or doing everyday tasks.
- Things that disturb your sleep, such as:
  - Sounds – For example, if you have a new baby, they might cry and wake you up at night.

- Health conditions, such as restless legs syndrome or nighttime leg cramps.
  - Schedule changes that affect sleep – This might include working a night shift or traveling to another time zone.
  - Medicines – Certain medicines can cause daytime sleepiness.
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## Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better?

That depends on the cause of your daytime sleepiness. But you can try having good sleep habits. This is also called "sleep hygiene" ( [table 1](#)). You should:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
  - Have drinks with caffeine in them only in the morning (including coffee and tea).
  - Avoid alcohol.
  - Avoid smoking, especially in the evening.
  - Lose weight, if you are overweight.
  - Exercise several days a week, but not right before bed.
  - Avoid looking at screens that give off light before bed. These include TVs, phones, tablets, "e-reader" devices, and videogames. Looking at screens just before going to bed can make it harder to fall asleep. It might also make your sleep less restful.
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## Should I see a doctor or nurse?

See a doctor or nurse if:

- You are often very sleepy in the daytime.
  - You fall asleep in the middle of normal activities.
  - You fall asleep in a dangerous situation, such as while driving.
  - You see or hear things that are not really there.
  - When you wake up, you can't move right away.
  - Your muscles feel weak if you laugh or get excited or angry.
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## Will I need tests?

Your doctor or nurse will decide which tests you should have. There are many different tests, but you might not need any. It depends on your age, other symptoms, and individual

situation.

A "sleep study" is the most common test that doctors use to find the cause of daytime sleepiness. For this test, you spend the night in a sleep lab at a hospital or doctor's office. You are hooked up to different machines that monitor your heart rate, breathing, and other body functions. The results of the test tell your doctor or nurse if you have a sleep disorder.

Your doctor or nurse might also ask you to keep a daily log for 1 to 2 weeks, where you keep track of how you sleep each night.

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## How is daytime sleepiness treated?

That depends on what is causing your daytime sleepiness. Treatments can include:

- Lifestyle changes – These can include changing your work schedule, taking naps, losing weight, or avoiding caffeine and alcohol.
- Devices that you wear at night – These can help people with sleep apnea.
- Medicines – There are medicines that can help you stay awake in the daytime or sleep better at night.
- Surgery – A few people with sleep apnea have surgery to treat it. But most people don't need surgery for daytime sleepiness.

If you have a medical condition that is causing your sleepiness, you might need treatment for that, too.

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## Can daytime sleepiness be prevented?

You can reduce your chances of daytime sleepiness by having good sleep habits. If your doctor or nurse prescribes medicine or a device to wear, use it exactly how they tell you to.

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## What if my child gets daytime sleepiness?

In children, daytime sleepiness is usually caused by not sleeping enough at night or not having good sleep habits. Some medicines can also make your child sleepy in the daytime.

Children with daytime sleepiness can act differently from sleepy adults. For example, your child might:

- Have trouble paying attention in school

- Be more active than usual
- Act angry or emotional

If you think that your child might have daytime sleepiness, talk to the doctor or nurse.

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## More on this topic

[Patient education: Insomnia \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Nocturnal \(nighttime\) leg cramps \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Restless legs syndrome \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Sleep apnea in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Sleep apnea in children \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Narcolepsy \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Sleep insufficiency \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Good sleep hygiene \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Insomnia \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Insomnia treatments \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Sleep apnea in adults \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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## GRAPHICS

### Sleep hygiene guidelines

Recommendation	Details
Keep a regular sleep schedule	Try to get up around the same time each morning. This will help you feel sleepy around the same time each evening. Getting up and going to bed on a regular schedule can improve sleep quality long-term.
Avoid napping	Try not to take naps. It's especially important to avoid naps lasting longer than 1 hour and naps late in the day.
Limit caffeine	Avoid caffeine after lunch. This will allow your body to process most of the caffeine before bedtime so it doesn't keep you from falling asleep.
Limit alcohol	In general, avoid alcohol near bedtime. Alcohol often makes you fall asleep quickly but wake up during the night.
Avoid nicotine	Nicotine can make it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. Avoid smoking or vaping near bedtime and at night.
Exercise	Getting regular physical activity is good for your health. It can also improve sleep if you exercise at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime. Heavy exercise within 2 hours of bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep.
Keep the sleep area quiet and dark	Noise and light during the night can disrupt sleep. It might help to use white noise or ear plugs. Using blackout shades or an eye mask can block light. It's also a good idea to avoid looking at screens before bedtime.
Bedroom clock	Avoid checking the time at night. This can make it harder to fall back asleep. This includes alarm clocks and other devices (like a watch or smartphone).
Evening eating	Avoid eating a large meal close to bedtime. Try to eat a healthy and filling (but not too heavy) meal early in the evening. Avoid late-night snacks.

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