

Sleep Well

Sleep is important for well-being. Many people complain of poor sleep as they get older, and it can be caused by many factors. **Poor sleep can be a cause of problems with memory and thinking.**

Sleep apnea is a sleep problem where the brain does not get enough oxygen. The body does not go through a natural sleep rhythm, and so you are always tired, and fall asleep easily. You may snore, gasp for breath, and feel tired during the day. This can make you feel “foggy” during the day, which can make it hard to recall details or make decisions.

Sleep apnea can be diagnosed through a safe test ordered by your health care provider. It can be treated using a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machine. Research has shown that treatment for sleep apnea improves thinking.

Insomnia is trouble falling or staying asleep. It can be a minor annoyance, or a major problem. Insomnia is **not** considered a normal part of aging. Common causes are:

- Napping during the day, or little exposure to daytime sunlight
- Too much noise or light in the bedroom; or a bedroom that is too hot or cold
- Using the bed for activities like reading or watching television
- Medications, herbal remedies, or caffeine (especially later in the day)
- Medical conditions
- Specific sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome

The workup for insomnia involves finding these factors, and a basic medical check-up.

Most people can improve their sleep without using medications. If people can find the issues that interfere with their sleep, and start healthier sleep habits, they can be better rested. In some cases, medications can help. The goal is for **short-term** medication use.

What you can do:

Sleep apnea: Ask your health care provider about sleep apnea. If there is reason for concern, a sleep study can be done. *There are no drugs or injections used during a sleep study* – your brain waves and breathing patterns are measured.

If you have sleep apnea, use your CPAP machine. Make sure that the mask fits well and the **settings are correct. For concerns, contact the clinic that provided the machine.**

Insomnia: Think about factors that might impact your sleep, such as caffeine, light in the room, daytime naps, or interruptions from pets or a snoring bed partner. Exercise can improve sleep, but sometimes exercise at night can make it harder to fall asleep. Ask your health care provider about treatments, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I). Visit the Well-Being section at <https://www.va.gov/geriatrics>.

