

# Why Am I So Tired?



Katy plopped into bed exhausted. Her first day in the new neighborhood had been stressful for her. There was the work of unpacking. There were the curious stares from the neighbors. Would she make friends? Would this new place ever feel like home? Now she just needed to get some sleep. But tomorrow was going to be worse. It was the first day of school!

She turned out the light, punched the pillow into a comfortable shape--and stared at the wall. And stared. And stared. *Oh, no--not again*, she thought to herself. When the lighted dial of her clock showed midnight, she turned over on her back. The next time she looked, it was 1 a.m., then 2 a.m. *Perfect. I'll certainly make an impression on the kids in the lunchroom tomorrow, especially if I fall asleep face down in my soup! I'll bet they haven't seen that before.*

Katy has a sleep disorder called insomnia. According to the National Institutes of Health, about 40 million Americans have sleep disorders that keep them awake most nights. Sleep disorders affect people in every age group.

Here's a look at some of the most common sleep disorders.

## Insomnia: Eyes Wide Open

People with insomnia have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep. They are often grouchy the next morning and can't concentrate in class.

Poor sleep habits, such as irregular bedtimes and waking times, staying late at a party, watching TV, being on the Internet endlessly, and playing computer games right before bed can cause insomnia.

Stress causes a lot of insomnia. You may have had mild insomnia the night before a big test. Like Katy, you probably have had some sleepless nights when something stressful was going on in your life, such as moving or the divorce of your parents. This kind of insomnia goes away when the event that causes the stress is over.

Changing your habits or talking with someone about your problems is a good way to cure insomnia. In some cases, a doctor can recommend a drug to help you get to sleep.

## **Restless Leg Syndrome**

If you have Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS), your legs tingle and ache when you lie down in bed. The only way to stop the unpleasant feeling is to get up and move around. That keeps you from falling asleep or wakes you up if you were already asleep.

RLS may be inherited, or it may occur because of nerve damage in the legs. Although RLS is not serious, it is annoying for the person who can't get to sleep. Certain drugs may help relieve RLS.

## **Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea is a breathing disorder in which you actually stop breathing. It usually happens when your windpipe flattens and air can't get through. Your brain wakes you just enough to signal you to breathe. These pauses may happen from 20 times a night to several hundred times a night. You're sleepy in the morning because you didn't get enough deep sleep, but you don't remember waking up.

Some people with sleep apnea can avoid the problem by sleeping on their sides. Children with sleep apnea can often be helped by having their tonsils and adenoids removed.

## **Sleepwalking and Night Terrors**

Most kids outgrow these two disorders by the age of 12. If you or someone in your family sleepwalks, lock the windows and doors to the outside, and put gates up by staircases. You don't need to wake up a person who is sleepwalking; just lead him or her back to bed.

Someone who has night terrors wakes up screaming. He or she has not been dreaming and doesn't remember the incident in the morning. A few minutes of quiet talk will be calming and help the person go back to sleep.

## **Sleep Rhythms**

This isn't a disorder, but it affects many preteens and teens. Researchers have found that a teenager's brain works on a different schedule. A teen may not be ready to go to bed until after 11 p.m. One school district in Minnesota changed the starting time of the high school from 7:20 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. The teachers found that the students were then ready to learn in their first period class. Many students' grades went up.

Sleep gives the brain time to repair nerve connections and to store information. When you're not getting enough sleep, you can lose your good judgment. You don't do well in school, and you start to think you can't succeed in anything. Kids in elementary school need nine to eleven hours of sleep each night. Don't let a sleep disorder rob you of your ZZZ time.

## How to Get Enough ZZZs

Here are some tips for getting to sleep and staying asleep.

- Avoid caffeine within four to six hours of bedtime. That means staying away from sodas and coffee.
- Exercise daily, but avoid strenuous exercise within six hours of bedtime.
- Keep your bed for sleeping. Don't do homework on it.
- If you can't fall asleep, leave your bedroom and go somewhere else to read. Go back to bed when you are tired.
- Get up at about the same time on weekdays and on weekends.
- If you nap, do it before 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and don't sleep for more than an hour.
- Get into bright light quickly in the morning, but avoid it in the evening.
- Wind down before going to bed. Avoid heavy reading, studying, and computer games within an hour of going to bed.