

Diabetes and Sleep Problems



How much sleep should I get at night?

Most people need 7-9 hours of sleep a night. Sleep is important! People who don't get enough sleep have an increased risk for obesity, high blood pressure, high blood sugars, heart disease and stroke.



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What are common sleep problems in people with diabetes?

A person with diabetes is more likely to have problems sleeping than a person without diabetes. There are some conditions that make sleeping difficult that are more common for people with diabetes. **Restless legs syndrome (RLS)** is one of those conditions. RLS is a condition of the nerves that cause irritation or an urge to move the legs when the legs are at rest.

Another condition that causes sleep problems that is more common in people with diabetes is **sleep apnea**. Sleep apnea is when you have pauses in breathing while you sleep. The pauses may be seconds or minutes. These pauses in breathing can happen several times an hour. The quality of sleep a person has in this situation is very poor. As a result, a person with sleep apnea is likely to feel very **tired during the day**.

What puts a person at risk for Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS)?

Diabetes, kidney disease, Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis put a person at higher risk for RLS.

How is RLS treated?

Restless legs syndrome often improves when diabetes is controlled. If your diabetes is not well controlled, ask your provider and your diabetes educator what steps can be taken to get on track.

Some people find some relief with making certain lifestyle changes. Cutting back on alcohol, caffeine and tobacco have helped some people. Massage, hot packs or cold packs also can help with symptoms for some people. There are also medications that are used to treat RLS.

Sleep Apnea

What puts a person at risk for developing sleep apnea?

Some of the risk factors for sleep apnea include: being overweight, having high blood pressure, having diabetes and using tobacco.

How would I know if I have sleep apnea?

The most common symptoms of sleep apnea are snoring, waking up at night, and feeling tired during the day. The only way to know for sure if you have sleep apnea is to have a sleep study done.

A sleep study is usually done in a private room at a lab. During a sleep study, monitors are placed on the person. After the person falls asleep, the monitors can detect how deeply a person sleeps, how often a person wakes up during the night, and for how long they are awake.



How is sleep apnea treated?

In addition to weight loss, sleep apnea is treated with a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine. The CPAP machine has a mask the person wears when they sleep. The mask delivers pressured air. The pressure from the air keeps a person's throat from closing while they sleep.



CPAP Machine

Another option for some people with sleep apnea is an "oral appliance" made by a dentist. The oral appliance can help change the position of the person's jaw while they sleep. The new position can help keep the throat open during sleep.

There are also some surgeries that can help with sleep apnea.

What are some other ways my diabetes might be affecting my sleep?

When a person has very **high blood sugar**, it causes them to have to pee frequently. Having to get up throughout the night makes getting a good night's sleep difficult. There is more than one reason a person may have to pee frequently during the night. Talk to your provider if this is a problem for you.

If a person's **blood sugar gets too low** during the night they may wake up shaking and sweaty. If this is happening to you, try checking your blood sugar during this time to find out if low blood sugars are causing you to wake up. If your blood sugar is going low at night, talk to your provider.

Pain in the feet or leg cramps might be a symptom of diabetic neuropathy, or nerve damage. This pain can make sleeping difficult. There are medications that help treat nerve pain. Some people also find relief from certain stretches.

What steps can I take to improve the quality of my sleep?

There are many things that have been shown to help people sleep better, such as:

1. Avoid using any electronic devices an hour before bed. These are things like phones, computers, television or tablets.
2. Get daily exercise, but not right before going to bed.
3. Try to avoid keeping any types of lights on. A light can disrupt sleep. Dark rooms are best.
4. Try to avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening.
5. Alcohol causes people to have restless sleep. Consider limiting or avoiding alcohol.
6. Try doing relaxing activities before bed such as reading or meditation.

More Information

For more information or if you have questions, contact:

Diabetes Educator: _____

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Diabetes Program

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