



FACT SHEET

Brain Injury & Sleep

*Do you
have
trouble
with
sleep
since
your
brain
injury?*

What does this mean?

Many people who have brain injuries suffer from sleep disturbances. Not sleeping well can increase or worsen depression, anxiety, fatigue, irritability, and one's sense of well-being. A review of studies and surveys suggest that sleep disorders are three times more common in traumatic brain injury patients than in the general population and that nearly 60% of people with traumatic brain injury experience long-term difficulties with sleep. Women are more likely to be affected than men. Sleep problems are more likely to develop as the person ages.

How might a brain injury affect sleep?

Physical and chemical changes in the brain, changes in breathing control, side-effects of medications, daytime sleeping (napping) and physical inactivity, presence of pain and/or depression, and use of alcohol, caffeine and/or nicotine all affect one's sleep pattern.

Common examples of sleep difficulties:

- ◆ **Insomnia:** Difficulty with falling asleep or staying asleep; or sleep that does not make you feel rested. Insomnia can worsen other problems resulting from brain injury, including behavioral and cognitive (thinking) difficulties. Insomnia makes it harder to learn new things. Insomnia is typically worse directly after injury and often improves as time passes.
- ◆ **Excessive Daytime Sleepiness:** Extreme drowsiness.
- ◆ **Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome:** Mixed-up sleep patterns.
- ◆ **Narcolepsy:** Falling asleep suddenly and uncontrollably during the day.

Recommended strategies:

- ◆ Set an alarm to try to wake up at the same time every day.
- ◆ Exercise every day.
- ◆ Don't nap more than 20 minutes during the day.
- ◆ Try to go to bed at the same time every night.
- ◆ Avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and sugar for five hours before bedtime.
- ◆ Keep stress out of the bedroom.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor to explore safe and effective treatments and/or medications.
- ◆ Non-pharmacological therapies (i.e., psychotherapy [counseling], relaxation therapy, use of special bright lights [phototherapy]).
- ◆ Natural remedies (herbal teas, melatonin and valerian).

Sources: IU School of Medicine / Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana TBI Model Systems. Further, the information in this FACT SHEET is also based on a consensus of expert opinion of the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana Departments of Neuropsychology and Resource Facilitation.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatments.

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