

ADHD and Sleep

An estimated 50-75% of adults with ADHD experience sleeping problems, ranging from insomnia to secondary sleep conditions. If you have ADHD, you are more likely than others to sleep for shorter periods overall, have problems initiating sleep and remaining asleep, and you may even develop sleep disorders.

Although children with ADHD experience difficulties in this domain, it is understood that sleep problems worsen during adolescence and increase thereafter. Studies have shown that sleep deprivation in ADHD can be as impairing as other adult symptoms combined.

The connection between ADHD and sleep

Sleep problems appear to differ depending on the ADHD sub-type.

If you have inattentive ADHD, you are more likely to go to bed at a later time, whilst those with predominantly hyperactive and/or impulsive symptoms are more likely to experience insomnia. Those with the combined sub-type tend to experience both a later bedtime and poor sleep quality.

Regardless of sub-type, many people with ADHD experience daytime sleepiness and difficulty waking or getting up in the morning.



Recommendations for better sleep

Non-medical strategies and homely remedies

No matter the explanation for your sleep problems, the solution usually involves a focus on sleep hygiene, which considers each of the factors that help to initiate and maintain a healthy sleeping pattern. Not all of these conditions will work for you, but they are all worth trying.

Stimulus control. Go to bed only when you feel tired. If your body is not ready for sleep, you cannot force it to sleep. Many people with ADHD are 'on the go' for much of the day - including up until bedtime - and think they will sleep instantly as a result. Going to bed only when sleepy will reduce the time you remain awake and alert in bed, and reduce any frustration you may experience by being unable to settle.

Sleep restriction. If you cannot fall asleep, get up again for a short while. Try to engage in a relaxing activity (recommendations below), and return to bed when you have wound down. Try not to expose yourself to any bright light or perform activities that will alert your brain even more (e.g., screen time, work-related activities). If you have a tendency to hyper-fixate on certain tasks, try to avoid these before bed as they will likely affect your ability to wind down.

Develop sleep rituals. Try to develop habits to let your body know to prepare for bed. Include things that you enjoy and that relax you. You might want to listen to relaxing music, read or listen to an audio book, or have a cup of caffeine-free tea. Relaxation techniques such as a hot bath or shower, stretching, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, and deep breathing may also help to relieve anxiety, reduce muscle tension, and allow you to fall asleep more easily. There are numerous apps that can be used to aid sleep



Web additudemag.com/sleep-app-self-care-adhd/

Do not take your worries and responsibilities to bed. Ruminating will only keep you awake. If you are worried about not completing tasks, for example, find time before bed to think about these issues and make your 'to do' lists. This will hopefully relieve you of any anxiety, and jobs will be set aside for a more appropriate time.

Stay away from caffeine, sugar, nicotine and alcohol at least 4-6 hours before bed. Avoid exercise in the evenings as far as possible.

While exercise is recommended for your overall physical and mental health – and it certainly can improve sleep - try to avoid exercise during the evenings and definitely before bed.

Try to regulate your sleep pattern by getting up at the same time every day. The human body likes regularity with almost everything, including sleep. Sticking to a regular schedule will keep your sleep in a natural rhythm. Choose a time that is realistic and age-appropriate to get the recommended sleep for your age group. For adults, 7-8 hours is recommended. Try to avoid napping during the day.

Optimise your sleep environment. Make sure your environment is quiet, calm and comfortable. Noise-cancelling earphones, heavy curtains, or a white noise machine may help. Make sure your curtains block light in the morning or try wearing an eye mask.

Psychiatric treatment / medication

People respond to medication variously; what works for one person may not necessarily work for you. Poor sleep can sometimes result from taking stimulant medication, which complicates the treatment of ADHD. However, for some people, stimulants can improve sleep. This may be by reducing hyperactivity, for example, allowing people's minds and bodies to rest more easily. Non-stimulant medications may also be available in cases where stimulants are found to contribute to sleep problems.

If you experience significant difficulties with sleep, and sleep hygiene strategies have proven ineffective, then it is recommended that you seek further advice from your GP. There are medications available to treat insomnia but these are likely to be prescribed for short-term use only. In extreme cases where you have exhausted both psychiatric and non-medical options, you may wish to seek a referral to a Sleep Disorder clinic. Sleep can be a very complex problem, and further assessment from sleep specialists may be required.

