

Sleep is a quiet, restful, active brain state during which our brain performs several important functions:

- Restores energy
- Stores and organizes memories
- Restoring ability to concentrate and pay attention
- Regulating our metabolism, hunger, and cravings
- Repairing muscles and allows them to recover
- Processing our emotions
- Rebuilding our health and wellbeing

The **sleep-wake cycle** is regulated by two biological mechanisms:

- **Sleep drive**, or pressure to sleep, builds up in our body throughout the day
 - Pressure increases the longer we stay awake
 - Pressure decreases during sleep, reaching a low after a full night of good-quality sleep
 - This process restarts as we awaken and repeats daily
- **Circadian rhythm** is a 24-hour cycle that is part of the body's internal clock
 - It is naturally aligned with the cycle of day and night
 - It runs constantly in the “background” of our mind and body, managing processes like alertness or sleepiness, appetite, and body temperature
 - It can be disrupted by situational or environmental factors, including travel and work
 - It can also be disrupted by underlying medical or psychological conditions, such as traumatic brain injury, obstructive sleep apnea, depression, or anxiety

According to the National Sleep Foundation, most adults need about **7 to 9 hours of restful sleep each night**. Unfortunately, nearly 30% of adults get less than 6 hours of restful, restorative sleep, and about 1/3 of adults report difficulty sleeping. How do I know if this is a serious problem?

A **sleep disorder** involves problems with sleep quality (how restful sleep is) and quantity (amount of sleep) and can result in daytime stress and difficulty completing daily life tasks. Sleep disorders often occur along with medical conditions; mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety; and/or cognitive difficulties. **Insomnia** is the most common sleep disorder—6 to 10% of adults struggle specifically with insomnia. What is **insomnia** exactly?

Insomnia is a sleep disorder that includes the following symptoms:

- Dissatisfaction with quantity or quality of sleep
 - Difficulty falling asleep (>30 minutes)
 - Difficulty staying asleep (wake up multiple times per night)
 - Undesired early morning awakenings (typically between 2 to 4 am)
- Symptoms occur at least 3 nights per week
- Symptoms cause significant distress and impairments in important areas of daily functioning
 - Do not feel well-rested upon awakening
 - Feel tired and sleepy during the day



- Feel more irritable, depressed, or anxious
- Have more difficulty paying attention or remembering things
- Symptoms can last for varying lengths of time and can occur again:
 - Short-term (episodic): symptoms last 1-3 months
 - Longer-term (chronic or persistent): symptoms last at least 3 months
 - Happen again (recurrent): 2 or more episodes per year

People who get more restful, restorative sleep tend to feel more energized, think more clearly, have fewer emotional challenges during the day, and handle stressors more easily. See the handout [Ten Tips for Better Sleep](#) to learn ways to improve your sleep quality.

Additional Comments:

