

# How to tell if stress is affecting your sleep

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Sleep deprivation effects Stress and sleep Reducing stress Takeaway

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Stress often impacts on sleep quality and duration. Stress and a lack of sleep can both have a severe impact on physical and mental health. Experts recommend that people aim for 7–9 hours of sleep a night, depending on their age and other factors.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 35.2 percent of adults in the United States are getting less than 7 hours of sleep each night. This can lead to a sleep deficit that results in lasting physical and mental health problems.

The exact role of sleep is not clear, but research has shown that it facilitates a wide range of bodily processes. These include physical changes, such as muscle repair, and mental tasks, such as concentration.

# Sleep deprivation effects

Not getting enough sleep can cause a negative mood, low energy, difficulty concentrating, and a general inability to function as usual.

Lack of sleep may have severe consequences in some circumstances, such as if a person is driving or operating heavy machinery when tired.

The occasional night of poor sleep is unlikely to cause harm, but persistent sleep deprivation can increase the risk of several chronic health conditions.

According to a report by the CDC, people who get less than 7 hours of sleep per night have an increased risk of the following conditions:

- obesity
- heart disease
- diabetes
- stroke
- depression
- arthritis
- kidney disease

Although a range of factors can cause these conditions, sleep deprivation may contribute to their development.



Persistent sleep deprivation can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and depression.

# The link between stress and sleep

Stress has many negative connotations, but it is a response that has evolved in humans and animals to allow them to deal with important or dangerous situations.

In humans, stress can cause the central nervous system (CNS) to release hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones raise the heart rate to circulate blood to vital organs and muscles more efficiently, preparing the body to take immediate action if necessary.

This CNS reaction is known as the fight-or-flight response, and it was vital for human survival during the earlier stages of evolution.

Nowadays, issues that are not a threat to survival can trigger the fight-or-flight response. For example, problems at work or relationship difficulties.

## What stress does to the body in the long term

It is normal to feel stressed occasionally, but chronic feelings of stress can cause the CNS to maintain a heightened state of arousal for extended periods. Being in this state can severely impact physical and mental health in the long term.

One effect of stress is that it can cause sleep deprivation. Frequently being in a heightened state of alertness can delay the onset of sleep and cause rapid, anxious thoughts to occur at night. Insufficient sleep can then cause further stress.

According to a National Sleep Foundation survey, 43 percent of people aged 13–64 have reported lying awake at night due to stress at least once in the past month.

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# Reducing stress levels to improve sleep

By lowering their stress levels in the evening before bed, many people could improve the duration and quality of their sleep.

The lifestyle changes below may help reduce stress:

## Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a relaxation technique that aims to make people more aware of the present moment. The aim is to acknowledge all the thoughts, feelings, and sensations happening within and outside the body without reacting to them.

Research has shown that this technique offers several benefits for mental well-being. A review of 47 trials, which included a total of 3,515 participants, found that mindfulness meditation led to small-to-moderate improvements in anxiety, depression, and stress.

More high-quality research is necessary to determine whether or not mindfulness works as a clinical treatment, but it may be a useful at-home method for people to use.

Practicing mindfulness for 10–30 minutes before going to bed could be an effective method of reducing stress and improving sleep.

## Exercise

Physical exercise is a useful tool for improving mental health and well-being, as well as providing physical benefits.

Research suggests that the effects of physical exercise on psychological well-being could make it a suitable treatment for anxiety and stress-related disorders, reducing the need to pursue other treatments.



A review published in 2017 found that physical activity is effective at reducing the symptoms of anxiety and stress.

Exercise can reduce the symptoms of anxiety and stress.

Further evidence also suggests that exercise has a direct impact on improving the quality of sleep in people over the age of 40 with sleep difficulties.

Engaging in moderate or high-intensity physical exercise, such as a 30-minute run, could help reduce stress levels and improve sleep quality.

## Other lifestyle changes

The following lifestyle changes may also help some people reduce their stress levels:

- adapting to a more healthful diet
- lowering caffeine and alcohol intake
- avoiding taking work home or checking work emails in the evening
- seeking support from friends and family

Reducing stress can be very challenging. It is essential to identify the source of the stress, which is often related to work or a relationship. Although these problems can be difficult and slow to resolve, removing the source of stress is vital to getting better.

## Takeaway

Stress and sleep are closely linked. Stress can adversely affect sleep quality and duration, while insufficient sleep can increase stress levels. Both stress and a lack of sleep can lead to lasting physical and mental health problems.

It is crucial that people who are having issues with stress or lack of sleep do not try to tackle these problems alone.

Mental health professionals can provide care and guidance, and friends and family members can offer additional support.

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## Additional information

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