

# PTSD and Sleep

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Sleep problems are a common issue for people of all ages, but anyone diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder is more likely to experience difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. Sleep disturbances and nightmares are common symptoms of PTSD, and these symptoms may even exacerbate other PTSD symptoms and make treatment more difficult.

*Note: The content on Sleepopolis is meant to be informative in nature, but shouldn't be taken as medical advice. Consult with a qualified medical provider before modifying your child's existing sleep routine. If you feel you may be suffering from any sleep disorder or medical condition, please see a healthcare provider.*

## Why Do People With PTSD Have Sleep Problems?

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Sleep problems are common with PTSD for a number of reasons.

- It's common for patients with PTSD to feel that they **need to be constantly on the lookout for danger**. This hyper-alertness will often interfere with sleep. Patients may have trouble relaxing to fall asleep. They may also wake up easily and have trouble [falling back to sleep](#).
- **Negative thoughts and worry** can interfere with falling asleep. Worry may involve typical problems of daily life, or it can extend to extensive fears about personal safety or the safety of loved ones. Sometimes, even worry about being able to fall asleep can interfere with the ability to sleep.
- **Self-medication with drugs and alcohol** is a common issue for people experiencing PTSD. Over-consumption of alcohol can interfere with sleep. [Alcohol also interferes with sleep quality](#), and people often wake up feeling tired. Drugs can have a similar effect on sleep.
- **PTSD often involves nightmares**, which can disrupt sleep. After waking in the middle of the night from a nightmare, it may be difficult to get back to sleep again. Fear may also set in with

repeated nightmares: Some patients begin avoiding sleep because they don't want to experience nightmares.

- Patients who also **experience physical health issues** can have trouble sleeping. [Chronic pain](#) will often interfere with sleep. Digestive disorders, stomach problems, and reproductive issues in women are also common complaints. Many people have trouble falling asleep when they have a medical problem.

## **What Can You Do if You Have Sleep Problems?**

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If you are experiencing problems falling asleep or staying asleep at night, you may sleep better if you make some changes. Many adjustments are minor in nature but can still have a positive impact. When you make changes, follow through with the changes for several nights to see an improvement.

### **Change Your Sleeping Area**

Examine your [sleeping area](#) to make sure it's conducive to restful sleep. If your bedroom has too much activity, noise, or light, you may not be able to rest well. Create a quiet and comfortable sleeping area. Research mattress reviews to [find a mattress that fits your sleep needs](#). Clinicians recommend that you use your bedroom for sleeping or sex only: Do not watch television or listen to the radio in your bedroom. Block out all light to ensure that the bedroom is dark. Keep the temperature cool for optimal sleeping. Some people sleep better with a white noise machine providing constant background noise, which also helps to block out other noises.

### **Keep a Bedtime Routine and Sleep Schedule**

Maintaining a [sleep schedule](#) with the same bedtime and wake-up time helps your body acclimate to this schedule. Over time, your body will naturally be ready for sleep at the same time and be ready to wake at the same time. Institute a soothing bedtime routine to get your body ready to sleep. Taking a warm shower or drinking a cup of decaffeinated tea may help. Avoid

engaging in energizing or stressful activities before sleep. If light and noise will disturb you, try wearing earplugs and a mask.



Going to bed at the same time every night can help make falling asleep easier  
**Try to Relax if You Can't Sleep**

If you can't sleep, focus on relaxing instead. You might get out of bed and engage in quiet reading on the sofa until you feel ready for sleep. Avoid watching television or using electronics in this situation because this could make it even more difficult to sleep. Try focused relaxation to get your body ready to

sleep. Imagine yourself in a peaceful setting, thinking about [specific details that make you feel relaxed](#).

## **Watch Your Activities During the Day**

Pay attention to your activities during waking hours to ensure that you're not engaging in activities that will interfere with sleep.

- **Daily exercise is important for overall health.** However, avoid exercising within two hours of bedtime.
- **Spend time outdoors** in the sunshine every day to help regulate your waking and sleeping cycles.
- Limit or avoid foods and beverages that contain **caffeine**.
- **Avoid alcohol**; it may cause sleep disturbances.
- **Avoid tobacco**; nicotine may cause sleep disruptions.

- Avoid napping during the day, **especially in the evening**.
- **Limit beverages after dinner** so you won't have to get up to use the bathroom.
- Avoid medications that can cause **sleeplessness**.

## Talk to Your Doctor

Consult your physician when you experience chronic sleep problems and disturbances. Anxious thoughts, nightmares, and pain are common causes of sleep problems, and a physician may be able to provide assistance. Depending on your symptoms and your general health condition, a doctor may be able to prescribe medication to help you sleep. You may also receive guidance to learn skills that can help you get better sleep.



Talking with your doctor could help provide some answers and lead to improved sleep

## Other Resources for PTSD

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- [REM Sleep Disturbances and PTSD](#): Patients with a PTSD diagnosis may also experience disturbed or reduced amounts of REM sleep, which may make symptoms worse.
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#): Persistent thoughts and memories are hallmarks of PTSD, and these thoughts often bother people during both the daytime and nighttime hours.
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Treatment](#): Treatment of PTSD usually involves psychotherapy and prescription medication to relieve depression and anxiety.
- [Sleep Problems Persist After PTSD Treatment, Study of Active Troops Finds](#): Nightmares and insomnia are the two main complaints of people suffering from PTSD.

- [Sleep and Mental Health](#): Psychiatric patients with issues such as anxiety and depression usually also experience sleep problems, and this is thought to be due to a strong connection between sleep and mental health.
- [Conduct Disorder in Relation to Trauma and Sleep](#): People who have experienced a trauma may develop a conduct disorder that involves some sort of disruptive behavior.
- [Fear, Safety, and the Role of Sleep in Human PTSD](#): A patient struggling with insufficient or poor sleep quality may not benefit from PTSD treatments and interventions.
- [What Dreams May Come: Treating the Nightmares of PTSD](#): A psychiatrist examines the sleep problems that can accompany PTSD and what is being done to address them.
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#): PTSD involves intrusive and recurring recollections of a traumatic event, which often leads to agitation, mood changes, and insomnia.
- [Improving Sleep Can Aid Recovery of Veterans With PTSD and TBI](#): The sleep disturbance and deprivation that usually accompanies PTSD often makes the condition much more severe.
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Overview](#): Typical symptoms of PTSD include detachment from loved ones, depression, irritability, intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and hypersensitive reactions.
- [Sleep Disorder Rates Six Times Higher Among Veterans](#): Estimates indicate that veterans are six times more likely to experience sleep disorders than people in the general population.
- [PTSD Fact Sheet](#) (PDF): Anyone who has experienced a traumatic event or has lived through a life-threatening situation can be at risk for developing PTSD.
- [Understanding PTSD and PTSD Treatment](#) (PDF): While it's typical to have strong memories after a traumatic event, these memories should not persist and interfere with daily functioning for more than a couple of months.
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#): PTSD patients experience symptoms that include re-experiencing the trauma, avoiding triggers, and arousal to the vivid memories.
- [How Dogs Can Help Veterans Overcome PTSD](#): Bonding with a dog can help relieve common PTSD symptoms in patients.

- [Let's Talk About Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) (PDF): The flashback episodes that plague PTSD patients can involve vivid memories that may be so strong that patients think they are actually reliving the experiences.
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Information](#): Someone with PTSD may begin avoiding activities that lead to memories of the trauma, trying to prevent flashbacks.
- [What Is PTSD?](#) Examples of life-threatening events that can lead to PTSD include natural disasters, military combat, serious accidents, and assaults.
- [PTSD Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment](#): Strong feelings of guilt, worry, isolation, and sadness typically engulf a person experiencing PTSD.