



Patient education: Daytime sleepiness (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is daytime sleepiness?

Daytime sleepiness is feeling sleepy during the daylight hours, when most people are awake and alert.

What causes daytime sleepiness?

Daytime sleepiness can be caused by:

- Not having good sleep habits – For example, not having enough time to sleep at night or not having a regular sleep schedule.
- A sleep disorder, such as:
 - Sleep apnea – People with this condition stop breathing for short periods during sleep.
 - Narcolepsy – People with this condition are very sleepy in the daytime and sometimes fall asleep suddenly during normal activities.
 - Insomnia – People with this condition have trouble falling or staying asleep.
- A medical problem, such as:
 - Hypothyroidism – This is the medical term for when a person does not make enough thyroid hormone. This hormone controls how your body uses and stores energy.
 - Depression – People with this condition feel sad or down a lot of the time. They often also have trouble working or doing everyday tasks.
- Things that disturb your sleep, such as:

- Sounds – For example, if you have a new baby, he or she might cry and wake you up at night.
 - Health conditions, such as restless legs syndrome or nighttime leg cramps.
 - Schedule changes that affect sleep – This might include working a night shift or traveling to another time zone.
 - Medicines – Certain medicines can cause daytime sleepiness.
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Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better?

That depends on the cause of your daytime sleepiness. But you can try having good sleep habits. This means that you:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
 - Have drinks with caffeine in them only in the morning (these include coffee and tea).
 - Avoid alcohol.
 - Avoid smoking, especially in the evening.
 - Lose weight if you are overweight.
 - Exercise several days a week, but not right before bed.
 - Stay off your back when sleeping. (This is not always possible and does not always work.)
 - Avoid looking at screens that give off light before bed. These include phones, tablets, "e-reader" devices, and television. Looking at screens just before going to bed can make it harder to fall asleep. It might also make your sleep less restful.
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Should I see a doctor or nurse?

See a doctor or nurse if:

- You are often very sleepy in the daytime.
- You fall asleep in the middle of normal activities.
- You fall asleep in a dangerous situation, such as while driving.
- You see or hear things that are not really there.
- When you wake up, you can't move right away.

- Your muscles feel weak if you laugh or get excited or angry.
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Will I need tests?

Your doctor or nurse will decide which tests you should have. There are many different tests, but you might not need any. It depends on your age, other symptoms, and individual situation.

A "sleep study" is the most common test doctors use to find the cause of daytime sleepiness. For this test, you spend the night in a sleep lab at a hospital or doctor's office. You are hooked up to different machines that monitor your heart rate, breathing, and other body functions. The results of the test tell your doctor or nurse if you have a sleep disorder.

Your doctor or nurse might also ask you to keep a daily log for 1 to 2 weeks, where you keep track of how you sleep each night.

How is daytime sleepiness treated?

That depends on what is causing your daytime sleepiness. Treatments can include:

- Lifestyle changes – These can include changing your work schedule, taking naps, losing weight, or avoiding caffeine and alcohol.
- Devices you wear at night – These can help people with sleep apnea.
- Medicines – There are medicines that can help you stay awake in the daytime or sleep better at night.
- Surgery – A few people with sleep apnea have surgery to treat it. But most people don't need surgery for daytime sleepiness.

If you have a medical condition that is causing your sleepiness, you might need treatment for that, too.

Can daytime sleepiness be prevented?

You can reduce your chances of daytime sleepiness by having good sleep habits. If your doctor or nurse prescribes medicine or a device to wear, use it exactly how he or she tells you.

What if my child gets daytime sleepiness?

In children, daytime sleepiness is usually caused by not sleeping enough at night or not having good sleep habits. Some medicines can also make your child sleepy in the daytime.

Children with daytime sleepiness can act differently from sleepy adults. For example, your child might:

- Have trouble paying attention in school
- Be more active than usual
- Act angry or emotional

If you think your child might have daytime sleepiness, talk to the doctor or nurse.

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