

Managing Insomnia for Caregivers

Sleep challenges are common for caregivers, especially when stress, worry, and changing routines make it difficult to rest.

What is insomnia?

Insomnia is difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early and not being able to fall back asleep. It can happen even when you have enough time to rest and can leave you feeling tired during the day.

Common causes of insomnia for caregivers

Caregiving can disrupt normal routines and increase stress, making it harder to sleep. Common causes include:

- Stress, worry, or racing thoughts about your loved one
- Changes in your daily routine or sleep schedule
- Feeling like you need to stay alert or “on call”
- An environment that makes it hard to rest (noises, interruptions, shared space)
- Feeling a loss of control over your time or routine
- Emotional strain, anxiety, or depression
- Irregular sleep habits or difficulty winding down

Signs and symptoms of insomnia

Insomnia can affect both your sleep and how you feel during the day. You may notice:

- Trouble falling asleep
- Waking up frequently during the night
- Waking up too early and not being able to fall back asleep
- Feeling tired or low energy during the day
- Difficulty concentrating or staying focused
- Feeling irritable, overwhelmed, or emotionally drained

If your sleep problems continue or begin to affect your daily functioning, it may be helpful to seek additional support.

Ways to manage insomnia

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule: try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends. A regular routine can help your body recognize when it is time to rest.
- Create a comfortable sleep environment: make your sleep space as calm and comfortable as possible. A cool, dark, and quiet room can help support better sleep.
- Limit screen time before bed: reduce exposure to phones, tablets, and TVs in the hours before bedtime. Bright lights can make it harder for your body to wind down.
- Establish a calming bedtime routine: create a simple routine to signal that it's time to rest, such as reading, stretching, or taking a warm shower.
- Move your body during the day: light physical activity, like walking or getting fresh air, can help your body feel more ready for sleep at night.
- Increase light exposure early in the day to reset circadian rhythms. Take a 20-40 minute walk outside after breakfast, sit by a sunny window with coffee for 20 minutes, or use light therapy (10,000 Lux Box) while you eat or work.
- Practice relaxation techniques: deep breathing, mindfulness, or gentle relaxation techniques can help quiet your mind before bed.
- Be patient with yourself: sleep difficulties are common during stressful times. Try not to put pressure on yourself to "sleep perfectly."
- Seek additional support if needed: if insomnia is ongoing or affecting your daily life, consider speaking with a healthcare provider. Additional support or treatment options may be helpful.