

The snooze you lose

Find out why you're not getting enough sleep. By Astrid Van Den Broek

Does this sound familiar? It's Sunday night (or Monday, or Tuesday...) and you've been lying in bed for two hours, wide awake. You've flipped over your pillows twice, thrown off the comforter, shoved the cat – and maybe your spouse – off the bed...hoping to snag some shut-eye. But now the anxiety is setting in.

Some version of this happens often to the 3.3 million Canadians who suffer from insomnia, according to the 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), released a few months ago. Insomnia or not, if your eyes don't gently flutter closed at night when your head hits the pillow, you may have a problem sleeping. Take this quiz to figure out why.





the quiz

Circle the response that is most similar to your own experience.

1 What's your usual bedtime routine?

- A. Turn on my dishwasher or wind up my baby's mobile to play for a half-hour before I slip into bed.
- B. I feel sleepy just before bed, but once I'm there, my legs are twitchy or I feel restless.
- C. Eat some crackers and cheese while watching *Law & Order*, brush my teeth and head to bed.
- D. Tackle my to-do list until I collapse into bed...and then lie awake, thinking about tomorrow's tasks for an hour or so until I doze off.

2 When you wake up in the middle of the night, it's because...

- A. I'm thirsty or have to use the bathroom.

- B. I suddenly remembered something I need to do, or have forgotten to do.
- C. My shift-work neighbour just pulled into her driveway.
- D. I'm not sure, but I feel exhausted, as if I haven't slept at all.

3 How would you describe your sleep?

- A. I often wake up with cold toes or feeling too hot.
- B. It's filled with anxiety dreams that wake me up with a start.
- C. Fits and starts – I fall asleep for an hour, wake for two, fall asleep for another two, and so forth.
- D. I keep waking up with heartburn or gas.

4 When I wake up I feel...

- A. starving. I can hardly wait for breakfast.
- B. glazed over – I swear I can still hear my husband snoring.

- C. worried. My toddler's already climbed out of his crib and is running around, or the phone is ringing and I know it's probably about work.
- D. as if I'm dragging my butt around. Did I get even two hours of sleep last night?

5 Which of these best describes you?

- A. I nap whenever I can.
- B. I regularly take sleeping pills – I can't fall asleep without them.
- C. I pile three comforters on my bed so I can get as cosy as possible.
- D. I sip some wine with – and long after – dinner.



answers



Points chart

- 1 A=3; B=4; C=1; D=2
- 2 A=1; B=2; C=3; D=4
- 3 A=3; B=2; C=4; D=1
- 4 A=1; B=3; C=2; D=4
- 5 A=2; B=4; C=3; D=1

Now add up your points to determine what the problem may be and how to solve it.

5 to 8 points

Blame your eating habits

While there's no proven link between eating a healthy diet and getting a good night's sleep, there are some sleep destroyers sitting at your dinner table. "If you have Coke and pizza at 10 p.m. and you go to sleep at 10:25, guess what? You'll be lying there with heartburn—and all caffeinated, too," says Dr. Judy Leech, interim director of the Sleep Medicine Centre at The Ottawa Hospital. "And it also might not happen right away—the heartburn might wake you up in the night." Ditto for spicy foods. As for that cabernet you swear helps make you drowsy? Alcohol may be a sedative, but it prevents you from falling into a deep sleep, particularly in the second half of the night. That's when the sedative effect wears off.

Try this Avoid spicy, heartburn-inducing foods at least a few hours before you hit the hay. And don't forget about the effects of other food and drink on your sleep. "Decrease your caffeine intake, or move it earlier in the day. Also, keep in mind that things other than coffee, such as tea and chocolate, have caffeine too," Dr. Leech says. As for alcohol, give it time—at least a few hours—to metabolize in your system. And if a busy bladder wakes you up, cut off liquids of any kind a few hours before bed. Thirsty types should keep a glass of water beside their bed—you won't have to further disturb your sleep by leaving the bed to get a drink.

Tip Tend to wake up hungry in the night? "Try eating a long-acting carb such as a whole wheat bun or high-fibre cereal before bed," says Dr. Leech.

9 to 12 points

Blame your stress

Under the gun at work? Going to rounds in the ring with your boyfriend at home? "There's no question stress often causes sleep problems," says Dr. Adam Blackman, medical director of the Toronto Sleep Institute. (Twenty-three per cent of the CCHS survey respondents who reported insomnia said they suffered from extremely stressful days.) "That's closely related to difficulties staying asleep, and that link gets worse as we get older, when it's thought that sleep gets less robust." Frequent napping can also thwart a good sleep because you're getting your deep sleep during the day and your body no longer needs it at night.

Try this Wind down before bed: meditate, read or just listen to soft music. Also, avoid exercise right before bedtime because it may stimulate your system just when it needs to settle down. Still having trouble? "Get out of bed and go to another room when you are not sleeping, and go to bed only when you are sleepy, so your bed and bedroom become associated with sleep rather than sleeplessness," advises Dr. Judith Davidson, a Kingston, Ont.-based clinical psychologist who focuses on sleep.

Tip Get Sunday night insomnia at the thought of the week ahead? "This can be caused by sleeping in late on the weekend, which disrupts your sleep clock," says Dr. Blackman. Make sure you don't sleep in more than an hour past your regular wake-up time on the weekends. If anxiety is keeping you awake, keep a pen and paper by your bed and add things to your to-do list as they occur to you, giving you a clear head for sleep.

“People are often focused on bedtimes, but setting a regular time for rising is actually more important.” – Dr. Adam Blackman

13 to 16 points

Blame your surroundings

“The sleep environment is the most important thing—good sleep hygiene includes keeping the bedroom for sex and sleep,” says Dr. Leech. Take a lesson from all new moms, who quickly learn what kind of environment baby—and you—sleep best in: the room has to be dark, noise should be almost non-existent and the temperature should be cool. Also, get rid of any computers, BlackBerries, pagers and cellphones in your bedroom.

Try this Spend a little dough to spend more time in bed. A low-cost darkening blind can help block out too-early daylight, and a small fan can give you a “white noise” effect if you have noisy neighbours. Alarm clock too bright? Throw a towel over it or put a thick book in front of it to block out bright digits.

Tip “Hot baths before bed sometimes work—but it’s not the heat of the bath that makes you sleepy,” says Dr. Leech. Darkness and a cooling feeling are two common sleep triggers, so lowering your body temperature after you come out of a warm soak is what helps bring on sleep. Too cold? “Try bed socks,” says Dr. Leech. “So you keep the room cool but your feet warm.”

17 to 20 points

Blame a sleep disorder

Do you grind your teeth? Are you a chronic snorer? Legs won’t stop twitching at night? Then you may have bruxism, sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome—all three are sleeping disorders, in addition to true medical insomnia. “Insomnia has a wide definition. Some people can’t get to sleep. Some people can get to sleep just fine, but can’t stay asleep,” says Dr. Leech. “Then there are people with early-morning wakening with terminal insomnia. In other words, they wake up early and feel they haven’t slept

enough, but feel they can’t sleep any further.” And some people have all three, she says. As for those sleeping pills? Using them regularly and possibly being addicted to them also hinders good sleep. They’re temporary measures to help you get to sleep, and using them longer than a few nights can actually kick-start insomnia.

Try this If you suspect you have some kind of sleeping problem, talk to your doctor first, says Dr. Davidson, to rule out that it’s not something physiological (such as hyperthyroidism) or there isn’t something underlying your troubles (such as depression). “The doctor may refer you to a sleep lab for further assessment, especially if sleepiness is a symptom and a sleep disorder other than insomnia is suspected,” says Dr. Davidson. Often, though, your family doctor can determine whether you have insomnia, Dr. Davidson explains, and she may prescribe a short course of sleeping medicine. “Your doctor may also refer you to a psychologist or other professional trained in behavioural sleep medicine.”

Tip Part of overcoming a sleep problem is ensuring you have regular sleeping hours. “People are often very focused on bedtimes, but setting a regular time for rising is actually more important. Our body clocks have difficulty shifting more than an hour or so, so if you wake up several hours later on the weekend, or have an irregular wake-up time during the week, your body clock may get de-synchronized,” says Dr. Blackman.

To get the lowdown on products that may help you get some sleep, see *Aiding and abetting*, page 140. >

Aiding and a-bedding

All tucked in and nowhere to go? There are umpteen products that promise to send you off to Slumberville. We sent our guinea pig...er, intrepid reporter...Nick Krewen to rate some of them on their zzz-factor, on a scale of one to five.

1.



1. Glo to Sleep (\$70, www.glotosleep.com) Strap on this thick mask of foam, stare up at the luminescent blue strip and feel yourself drifting away as your mind stops racing, generating alpha waves. Only problem: scientists have noticed increased alpha waves during peak sports performances as well. And then there's the issue of the ski goggle-sized gear competing with your pillow for your face. Still, it made things nice and dark. **Our verdict:** zz

to elevate your serotonin (your "feel-good" chemical) while regulating your melatonin (a hormone linked to sleep disorders). Aim it at a 35- to 40-degree angle about one to two feet away from your eyes for 15 minutes to an hour each day, and at night you'll sleep like a baby. At least that's the theory – for me, it just caused a lot of squinting. **Our verdict:** zz

and ylang-ylang massage for the scalp, neck and shoulders. Knead we say more? **Our verdict:** zzzz

2.



2. SoftLux Pillow (\$40 us plus \$15 shipping, www.softluxpillow.com) "Special comfort bubbles" – better known as plastic beads – help this pillow mould to your head and neck and keep you cool and comfortable. The double-quilted cover muffles the sound of the beads and prevents you from feeling as if you're sleeping on an abacus. **Our verdict:** zzz

4. The Sound Screen and SleepMate Electro-Mechanical Sound Conditioner (\$70, www.marpac.com) If your significant other's snoring registers on the Richter scale and the volume of outside traffic prevents your 36 winks from reaching 40, a blanket of electronically generated white noise promises to do the trick. By producing a continuous fan-like sound, this device blocks out all extraneous noise and offers you silence in return. **Our verdict:** zzzz

6. TheraSleep (\$20, www.therasleep.com) Juno-winning Canadian composer David Bradstreet and music therapist Amy Clements-Cortés employ "brainwave entrainment" (using stimuli such as sound or light to influence the rate of brainwaves) and calming melodies to lull your mind to sleep. **Our verdict:** zzzzz

3.



3. Litebook (about \$300, www.litebook.com) Sporting an array of uv-free white-light-emitting diodes, this gadget claims

5. Sleepy Head Scalp Massage Bar (\$11, www.lush.com) A cocoa butter, lavender oil

7. CPAP machines (up to \$2,500, www.cpapdeals.com) People with sleep apnea stop breathing for a short period of time repeatedly during sleep and often snore. For them, CPAP or constant positive airway pressure machines, which keep the airway open, are a necessity. For those who have to tolerate sufferers' nightly snoring, they're a godsend. Pricy, yes, but some provincial health plans will help offset the expense. Worth their weight in gold for relief. **Our verdict:** zzzzzz ●

4.



5.



6.



7.

