Many people who have brain injuries suffer from sleep disturbances. Not sleeping well can increase the risk of depression, irritability, poor work performance, and traffic or workplace accidents. Talk to your doctor to explore safe and effective solutions.

How Can Sleep Change After a Brain Injury?

The three most common disorders are:

- Insomnia - the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep through the night
- Excessive Daytime Sleepiness - extreme drowsiness
- Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome - experiencing mixed up sleep patterns

What Causes Sleep Problems?

Daytime Sleeping and Inactivity

- Sleeping when bored
- Daytime napping
- Watching too much TV
- Not having a set routine

Physical and Chemical Changes

- The “internal clock” controls when people sleep and wake every day. If injured, the brain may not be able to tell the body to fall asleep or wake up.
- There are chemicals in our body that help us to sleep. An injury can change the way that these chemicals affect the body.

Medications

- Medications taken after a brain injury may cause problems going to sleep or staying asleep.
- Other medications can make people sleepy during the day and unable to participate in activities.

Pain

- Many people who have suffered brain injuries also experience pain in other parts of the body. This discomfort may disturb sleep.
- Pain relieving medications may affect sleep.
What Can Be Done to Improve Sleep?

Talk to Your Doctor
- Discuss sleep issues with your doctor to determine potential causes and treatment.
- Remind your doctor that you have a brain injury.
- Ask your doctor about medications that can help you through the night, or that can keep you awake during the day.
- Discuss your current medications with your doctor to determine if they may be contributing to your sleep problems.

Nighttime Suggestions
- Set a schedule for bedtime and waking and stick to it!
- Follow a bedtime routine. For example, put out your clothes for morning, brush your teeth and then read for 10 minutes before turning out the light.
- Avoid caffeine and sugar for five hours before bedtime.
- Do not exercise within two hours of bedtime.
- Take your TV out of your bedroom.
- Keep stress out of the bedroom. For example, do not work or pay bills there.
- Create a restful atmosphere in the bedroom.
- Darken the room by closing window shades.

Daytime Suggestions
- Develop a daily schedule.
- Include meaningful activities in your schedule.
- Get off the couch and limit TV watching.
- Exercise every day.

The Heads Up newsletter is free!
Contact us to request a newsletter, provide change of address or to submit article ideas.

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Our mission: Improve traumatic brain injury care and outcomes through research, education and services.

The staff of Heads Up wants to hear from you! Please send your personal comments, suggestions or story to us.

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