

A close-up photograph of a sloth sleeping on a thick, dark brown tree branch. The sloth's fur is a mix of grey and brown, and its long, wrinkled nose is visible. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a tropical forest setting. A semi-transparent teal box is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing white text.

# PCOS and Can't Sleep? Why Sleep Matters & How To Improve Yours

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PCOS and can't sleep? Sleep is important to everyone as the amount and quality of sleep one gets contributes to our health and whether the body and mind will function optimally. Getting enough good sleep, at the right time, will help to protect your mental and physical health and your overall quality of life...

And PCOS and sleep deprivation occur more often together than is healthy.

Despite knowing that getting a good night's sleep is important we are often not able to prioritise sleep because of the hustle and bustle of life and the staggering deadlines of work. We rest when we can and sometimes that means only a few hours a night as we rush to meet the next day's workload.

However, whether we know it or not, this accumulating "sleep debt" will begin to affect all aspects of our health. The way we feel when we are awake partly depends on how we sleep. It is during sleep that the body is rejuvenating, recovering and repairing.

A survey conducted by the Harvard Women's Health Watch in 2006 found that people are sleeping less than six hours a night with roughly 75% experiencing sleep difficulties. While some insomnia is not a problem, it becomes one when it is recurring and chronic sleep loss accumulates. This can contribute to health problems such as PCOS weight gain, high blood pressure, behavioural issues, a decrease in the strength of the immune system and insulin resistance.

The ideal amount of sleep required can vary depending on age, lifestyle, and health. Children need more sleep than adults. On average an adult will need 7-9 hours of good sleep a day. But it should be efficient and quality sleep.



## The different sleep cycles

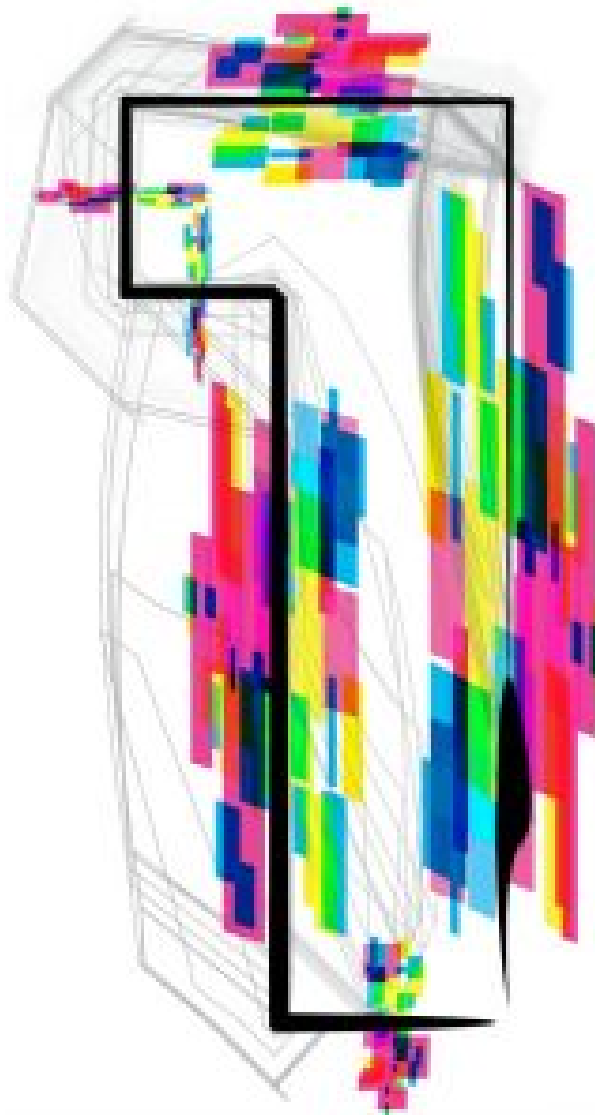
So what is good quality sleep?

A good night's sleep is divided into five continually shifting stages. The types of brain waves showing either light or deep sleep define each stage.

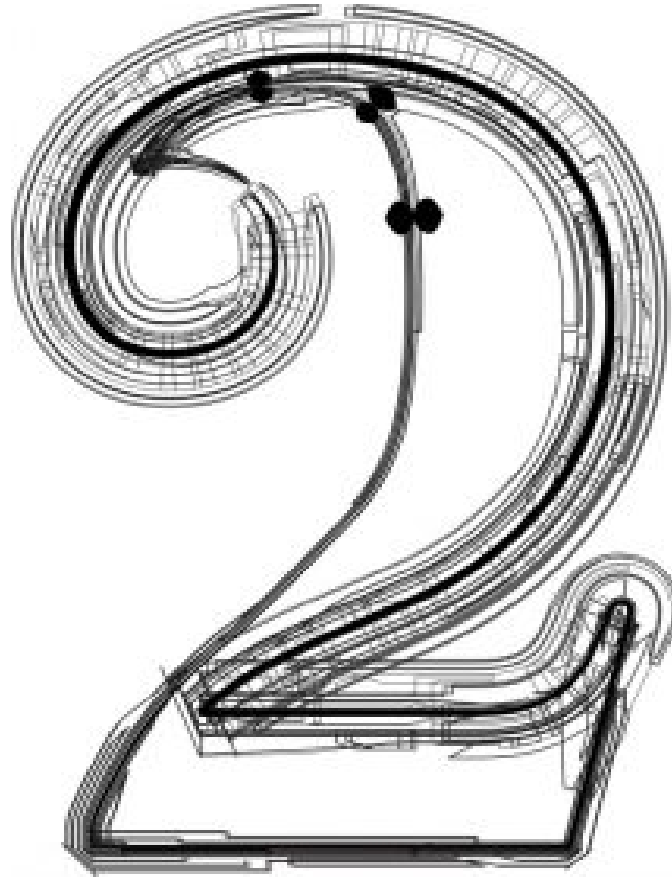
Sleep follows a pattern, alternating between NREM (non-rapid eye movement) sleep and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Usually this cycle repeats itself every 90 minutes throughout the night.

Sleep is often categorized into five different stages. NREM takes up 75% of our sleep and encompasses stages 1-4 while REM fills the remaining 25%.

**N1 or Stage 1** – This is when you are nodding off. It is the stage between asleep and awake and is a very light sleep. At this stage it is still very easy to wake you.



**N2 or Stage 2** – This is the onset of sleep. Breathing and heart rate become regular and your body temperature drops naturally. This is the lovely stage ushering you into a deeper sleep.



**N3 or Stages 3-4** – This is the deepest sleep. It is during this stage that the body truly begins to restore itself. Blood pressure drops and breathing becomes slower. In stage 4 the muscles relax and blood supply increases as tissue growth and repair occur. It is also during this stage that hormones such as the growth hormone are released, which aid in growth and muscle development. Lost energy is restored in this sleep stage.



**REM or Stage 5** – REM or rapid eye movement is the stage of sleeping where dreaming occurs. This stage usually happens roughly 90 minutes after you fall asleep and continues to grow longer throughout the night (making it very easy to wake up after dreaming).

In this stage energy is provided to the brain and body, eyes dart back and forth beneath the eyelids, and the body completely relaxes with your muscles turning off.

There are many who can sleep for long periods but have difficulty reaching the deeper restorative sleep stages. This is a sign of a potential sleep disorder that can lead to chronic lack of sleep and a host of health issues.



## Do I have a sleep disorder?

If you have PCOS and can't sleep trouble, or feel tired even after a full night's sleep, you may have a sleep disorder. This can be confirmed clinically by your doctor, but to get you started and help you determine if you need proper sleep evaluation, answer the following questions:

1. Is it hard for you to fall asleep or stay asleep?
2. Do you have a snoring problem? Or have others told you that your breathing is irregular while you are asleep?
3. Are your legs "active" at night? Do you feel any tingling, itching, or creeping in your legs while sleeping, making you feel like kicking your leg out to find relief?
4. Do you sleepwalk or have recurring nightmares?
5. Do you struggle with feeling sleepy or falling asleep during the day?
6. Do you have problems focusing and concentrating?
7. Do you wake up tired in the morning and find yourself unable to function during the day?
8. Has sleeplessness or fatigue been a constant problem for you for a period longer than two to three weeks?



If you've answered yes to more than two of these questions then have a chat with your doctor about it. If you don't, a chronic lack of sleep could start to cause serious problems and PCOS insomnia is not a healthful combination.

## **What is caused by lack of sleep?**

Bad sleeping habits have been linked to a host of health problems. Here are just some of the issues that could potentially arise from lack of good sleep:



1. *Weight gain* – Chronic sleep deprivation can cause changes in your body's metabolism by altering the way it processes carbohydrates, insulin resistance and the hormones that affect appetite.
2. *Cardiovascular problems* – Lack of sleep has been linked to hypertension, increased stress hormones, and even irregular heartbeat.
3. *Mood swings* – Not getting enough rest can cause irritability, inability to focus, impatience, general moodiness, and even depression.
4. *Memory loss* – Sleep helps the brain commit new information to memory. People who have adequate sleep learn new things faster and more efficiently versus people who did not.
5. *General safety issues* – Lack of sleep can affect everything you do during the day – this includes driving, walking, and more. When you are fatigued or falling asleep you increase the chances of getting into an accident.
6. *Weakened immune system* – Lack of sleep affects the immune system and alters immune function.

## 10 good sleep habits

It is important to prioritise sleep. However, falling asleep is sometimes not as easy as it sounds. Stress, everyday distractions, and just general busyness and life can make good sleep elusive.



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Here are some simple sleep habits to boost your chances of achieving the required amount of good sleep each night.



1. Maintain a regular sleep/wake schedule – As difficult as it is, a routine helps your body sleep better by “programming” it to follow a schedule.
2. Avoid screen time for at least an hour before bed (TV, mobile, tablet, etc). If you must use a screen, use a blue filter.
3. Avoid caffeine four to six hours before bed.
4. Don't smoke near bedtime or if you wake up at night.
5. Avoid alcohol as it can cause rebound waking.
6. Avoid heavy meals right before bed.
7. Minimise noise, light, and excessive hot or cold temperatures when you sleep.
8. Be comfortable in your bed with a good mattress and pillow.
9. Meditate as this will help you calm your mind and body and prepare for sleep.
10. Exercise regularly, as studies show having an active lifestyle can help with quality of sleep... Just don't exercise right before bed!

## Sleep Aids

While good sleep habits are important, sometimes they are not enough. When you still need help to improve your sleep, you can turn to sleep aids. Here are a few natural sleep aids that may be able to help you improve sleep quality.

1. **Melatonin** – This is the natural hormone your body produces to signal you that it is time to sleep. It naturally rises in the evening and falls in the morning. Melatonin supplements are a popular sleeping aid and especially important when the cycles are disrupted (moving through time zones, alternating job schedules).
2. **Valerian Root** – This herb from Asia and Europe is commonly used as a sleep-promoting supplement in the US and Europe. Although more studies are needed, valerian root has been shown to decrease sleep latency and improve sleep quality.
3. **Ginseng Root** – Ginseng has been used for years for health-promoting properties. Results of several studies indicate the use of ginseng root may be partly related to maintaining normal sleep and wakefulness.
4. **Lavender** – Lavender is a very popular aromatherapy scent. Its soothing fragrance is said to promote peace and calm and enhance sleep. Several studies show that smelling lavender oil 30 minutes before sleeping can improve quality of sleep.
5. **Passionflower** – Passionflower is a popular herbal remedy for insomnia. It is usually taken in tea form and can help improve sleep quality. However, more studies are needed to see how big of an effect it makes.
6. **Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)** – The dried strobile of the *humulus lupulus* is a popular sleep aid, which is also used for the treatment of intestinal ailments. The sedative effects of hops have been known to promote sleep. This is usually taken as an infused tea and can provide a calming effect within 20-40 minutes after ingestion.
7. **Magnesium** – This mineral is important for brain function and heart health. It can also help quiet the mind and make sleep easier. Studies have also shown that insufficient magnesium in your body may be linked to troubled sleep and insomnia as it naturally helps regulate your body's production of melatonin, and low magnesium levels have been found in women with PCOS.
8. **Tryptophan** – Have you ever wondered why you feel so sleepy after eating turkey? It's because of the sleep-promoting amino acid, tryptophan. A study has shown that even a very low dosage can help you fall asleep faster.

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These are just some of the most popular sleep aids. Coupled with good sleep habits and treatment from your health professional, as needed, a good night's sleep is well within your reach. The PCOS and can't sleep combination can become a thing of the past.

From PCOS to perfect health, with love,



Dr. Rebecca Harwin

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References & product links can be found at

[http://www.conquyourpcosnaturally.com/\\_blog/Blog/post/pcos-and-cant-sleep-why-sleep-matters/](http://www.conquyourpcosnaturally.com/_blog/Blog/post/pcos-and-cant-sleep-why-sleep-matters/)