

The Many Faces of Sleepiness

A PATIENT-FRIENDLY GUIDE TO EXCESSIVE DAYTIME SLEEPINESS

What Is Excessive Daytime Sleepiness?

Excessive Daytime Sleepiness (EDS) means feeling very sleepy during the day, even after a seemingly normal night of sleep. It's more than regular tiredness and is often missed or mistaken for other issues. Understanding the cause and getting the right treatment is important.

How to Recognize EDS: Sleepiness can take many forms

You might be sleepy even if you don't feel like you're about to fall asleep. It can show up as:

- **Low Energy:** Feeling sluggish, moving slowly, needing extra caffeine
- **Trouble Thinking:** Difficulty focusing, forgetfulness, slower reactions
- **Emotional Changes:** Irritability, stress, anxious, overwhelmed, low mood
- **Lack of Motivation:** Usual activities feel too hard, and procrastination
- **Performance Problems:** More mistakes, trouble paying attention at work
- **Physical Signs:** Frequent yawning, heavy eyelids, rubbing eyes, nodding off
- **Microsleeps:** Briefly "zoning out" and missing moments, feeling forgetful

In Children and Teens

- **"Hyper" or fidgety instead of sleepy**
- **Moodiness, angry outbursts**
- **Behavior problems at school and home**
- **Falling asleep in class or on the bus**

Why Might Someone Be So Sleepy?

Common reasons include:

- **Not enough time to sleep** busy schedule, shift work
- **Poor sleep quality** frequent waking, pain, stress
- **Sleep disorders:** Sleep apnea, narcolepsy, restless legs, insomnia etc.
- **Circadian rhythm problems** body clock out of sync with schedule
- **Medications,** alcohol, or drugs
- **Medical or mental health conditions** depression, anxiety, thyroid, menopause etc.

Why Unrecognized Sleepiness Is a Big Deal

Leaving excessive daytime sleepiness untreated can lead to:

Safety Risks: Microsleeps whilst driving, accidents, and near misses with tasks/tools.

Work or School Problems: Poor concentration/memory, more errors, or missing details.

Mood & Relationships: More arguments and irritability, anxiety, depression, and impatience.

Health Effects (Over Time): higher risk of heart disease/diabetes/high blood pressure, weight gain, headaches, worsening of other medical conditions.

Quality of Life: Less enjoyment of hobbies, not feeling like yourself, missing opportunities because you are too tired.

When to Be Concerned About Sleepiness

You may have excessive daytime sleepiness if:

- You often feel sleepy during the day, **3 or more days per week**
- You **doze off unintentionally, even if it's only a few minutes**
(*watching TV, reading, in meetings, in class*)
- You nap regularly or desire naps regularly
- You have had **near-misses or accidents** due to nodding off
- You wake feeling unrefreshed, even after a full night's sleep:
(*7-9hrs adults/8-10 children+ teens*)
- You've been told that you:
 - Snore loudly
 - Gasp or stop breathing in sleep
 - Toss and turn a lot
 - Are very hard to wake up
 - Fall asleep more than expected
 - Commonly seem like you are fighting the urge to fall asleep

What You Can Do

Step 1:

Track Your Sleep & Sleepiness (1–2 Weeks)

Write down:

- Bedtime and wake time
- How often you wake at night
- Naps
- Times you feel very sleepy or nod off

Step 2:

Simple Changes to Try

- Aim for 7–9 hours sleep time for adults
(*more for teens/children*)
- Keep a regular sleep schedule, even on weekends
- Limit caffeine mid-afternoon and beyond
- Avoid alcohol close to bedtime (*it can worsen sleep quality*)
- Create a wind-down routine in a dark, quiet, cool bedroom

Step 3:

Know when to see a Clinician or Sleep Specialist

Talk to a Clinician or Sleep Specialist If:

- Sleepiness affects your safety, work/school, relationships, function or quality of life
- You or a bed partner notice loud snoring, choking, or pauses in breathing
- You have sudden “attacks” of sleep or can’t stay awake in calm situations
- You’ve tried improving sleep habits but still feel very sleepy

► **TIP:** Bring your sleep diary to the visit. It will help you remember everything, and those details can better guide testing and treatment.