

**Children also may have trouble sleeping:**

Most often this is a result of their total life situation. If a child has trouble sleeping he or she could be reacting to family problems such as tensions between the parents. If your child is having trouble sleeping, talk about what he or she is thinking or dreaming about. Make regular and safe evening routines for your child. Read a fairy tale or sing a song. If your child's sleeping problems persist, contact the public health clinic or your doctor.

*Nightmares*

Nightmares often originate from things a person has experienced or may be caused by a stressful life situation. Many people have found that nightmares disappear when they find someone they trust to talk to. You may also be able to alleviate the worst effects of a nightmare by consciously reflecting on it, **but rather than stopping at the moment when you awaken, create a more positive continuation of the event in your nightmare.** Another variation of this can be to write down the nightmare and give it a more positive continuation.

*Sleeping pills*

You can ask a doctor for advice on taking sleeping pills. Generally sleeping pills are most helpful with acute sleep disorders when the pills are only taken for a short period of time. If you take sleeping pills over a long period of time you may gradually develop a need for stronger doses, with the ultimate risk of dependency. Therefore you should only use sleeping pills after careful consultation with your doctor. Your doctor will also determine the amount and type of pills to be used, considering various factors as weight, general state of health, other illnesses and the type of sleep disorder you have. Because the type of pill a person uses is determined by an individual assessment, pills must not be exchanged with others, nor must one take a larger dose than what is prescribed.

*If nothing helps*

Once in a while, after having tried virtually everything, you might still have trouble sleeping. One alternative is to ask your doctor to be referred to a specialist who can examine your sleeping problems. It should be a comfort for refugees to know that in most cases sleeping problems are associated with the life situation and that changes in this will mean changes in the sleeping pattern.

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**IF YOU  
HAVE TROUBLE  
SLEEPING...**



Many refugees have periods when they have trouble sleeping. Some may encounter problems every night (acute insomnia), others just once in a while. This could be problems getting to sleep, fitful sleep or recurring nightmares disrupting sleep.

If you have trouble sleeping, you may often find the roots of the problem in your life situation, and in your thoughts and reflections on previous events you have experienced. Previous strong experiences may also recur in nightmares, becoming part of the larger problem that has developed. Often difficulties one is having in life also affect sleep, and not getting enough sleep will make it harder for a person to cope with life's daily challenges. When you have trouble sleeping you should contact a doctor to see if your problems are caused by an illness or are connected with your life situation. Regardless the reason there are several things you can do to improve your sleep.

### *Advice for better sleep*

**Establish a good daily rhythm:** Much in a refugee's life plays havoc with his or her daily rhythm. At refugee reception centres many residents often stay up late into the night and it is easy to fall into this habit. For others, having nothing to do makes it easier to sleep in and then stay up longer at night. Try to change your daily rhythm so that it is more like the rhythm you had earlier before you had trouble sleeping. This might mean getting up early, even if you don't have anything special to do, and trying to go to bed at a more normal time in the evening. Your body also needs time to get used to new routines so don't expect immediate improvement in your sleep.

**Do the same thing every night before you go to bed:** Your body likes regular routines, and establishing these will gradually make it easier to fall asleep.

**Get daily exercise:** Physical activity is often effective in improving sleep. Just 15 minutes' exercise per day will help your body relax better when you go to bed. Wait 30 minutes after exercising before you go to bed so your body can relax. By physical exercise we mean things as simple as taking a walk before you go to bed. Perhaps having sex first will help you fall asleep.

**Avoid caffeine:** Caffeine is found in coffee, teas (not herbal teas), chocolate and colas. Caffeine is a stimulant which will keep you awake. Avoid taking something that contains caffeine, especially in the evening and night.

**Don't try to force sleep:** The harder you try to sleep the more difficult it will be.

**Get up if you haven't fallen asleep after 30 minutes:** Go to another room and sit quietly. Maybe try a relaxing activity for about 20 minutes before you go to bed again. Do this as often as necessary until you manage to sleep.

**Think of a peaceful place:** Lie down, close your eyes and think about your favourite place where it is calm and quiet. It might be a place in your home town, in your family's house, or on a sunny beach. Wherever it is, imagine you are there. You can feel the surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the flowers, feel the warm sun or whatever sensation is appropriate for the place you have chosen. Just relax and give in to the feeling - and slide into sleep. When you have first found a place which works for you, the more you use it, the easier it should be to fall asleep.