Sleep and Addiction Recovery

Whether you have a bad dream, toss and turn, or worry about an upcoming event, everyone has a poor night’s sleep from time to time. While a few restless nights are normal, for people in recovery, getting a good night’s sleep may be a bit more challenging.

The Relationship Between Sleep and Addiction

Substance use can impact sleep in several ways, including making it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep and altering the cycle of sleep stages (e.g., non-rapid eye movement).1 This can contribute to problems for those struggling with addiction and in recovery because sleep (or lack thereof) impacts next-day function.1

Insomnia, which causes difficulty initiating and maintaining sleep, is the sleep condition most diagnosed alongside a substance use disorder (SUD).1 According to a study in *Frontiers of Psychiatry*, more than 84% of patients struggling with SUD also experience insomnia symptoms.2 Studies show that substance use can exacerbate insomnia symptoms and other sleep-related difficulties. In return, this can increase a person’s risk of relapse.3

While insomnia and other sleep-related difficulties can be challenging for people struggling with addiction, they can also persist during the earlier stages of recovery, such as [drug detox](https://rehabs.com/treatment/detox/).2 One study found that 67% of patients experienced insomnia symptoms during the detox process.2In other instances, patients experienced disturbances like poor sleep quality or sleep-disordered breathing for weeks, months, and sometimes even years after initially stopping substance use.3

The Importance of Sleep in Addiction Recovery

Sleep plays a critical role in a person’s overall health, especially during addiction recovery. Sleep can reduce the risk of fatigue-related accidents or injuries in addition to promoting:4, 5, 6

* Proper cognitive function.
* Alertness and vigilance.
* Regulation of emotions and mood.
* Memory consolidation.
* Learning ability.
* Neural development.
* Cardiovascular, cerebrovascular, and metabolic health.

For someone in early recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD), these functions can be especially important as their body and mind recover from the effects of substance use. In addition to the potential benefits of sleep in early recovery, there may also be some dangers to not getting enough quality sleep during this time.

Some evidence suggests persistent sleep problems in addiction recovery may increase the risk of relapse.3 [Sleep problems during alcohol withdrawal](https://rehabs.com/alcohol/withdrawal/sleep/), such as increased sleep latency and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep have been connected to an increased risk of relapse in several studies.7

Some other drugs have shown a similar relationship between sleep and relapse. Awakening during the night was associated with an increased risk of relapse for nicotine in the first 6 months following treatment.7Another study found that total sleep time positively correlated to days of abstinence from cocaine over the first 6 weeks of recovery.1

Sleeping Tips for Addiction Recovery

Although problems with sleep and addiction recovery are often connected, there are things you can do to get a better night’s sleep. These tips for better sleep in recovery may be able to help you improve your slumber and [prevent relapse](https://rehabs.com/relapse-prevention/):8, 9. 10

* **Set a routine**. It’s best to keep a regular bedtime routine in recovery where you go to sleep and wake up around the same time each day, even on the weekends.
* **Create a good sleep environment**. A cool, dark, and quiet room can help improve sleep quality and duration.
* **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise boosts physical and mental health and can improve sleep.
* **Avoid caffeine**. Your caffeine use may be hurting your sleep quality. Caffeine use, especially later in the day, has been connected to increased sleep disruptions.
* **Limit screen time before bed**. There is growing evidence to suggest that using electronic devices right before bed may disrupt a person’s circadian rhythm and negatively impact sleep. Instead, find other ways to unwind before bedtime that do not involve a screen.