

# The Connection Between Sleep and Mental Health

By Courtney Rooks

**S**leep is an essential component of mental and physical health. Adequate sleep improves our cognitive abilities including emotional processing, self-control, ability to focus, and to retrieve information from memory. Yet many Americans do not receive adequate or proper quality sleep on a regular basis. According to the CDC, one third of adults in the U.S. do not get the recommended amount of sleep each night. Sleep disorders are much more common among individuals experiencing a mental health disorder including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and others. Among individuals in the U.S. with anxiety and depression, 50 – 90% also experience a sleep disorder.



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These sleep disturbances can be more than just insomnia. They can also be hypersomnia, nightmares, excessive daytime sleepiness, and sleep apnea. Both insomnia and hypersomnia, or sleeping too much, are common symptoms of depression. Anxiety can cause hypervigilance and ruminating or racing thoughts which can lead to insomnia. With bipolar disorder, sleep can vary significantly based on episodes of mania or depression, but poor sleep can also persist between episodes.

Sleep disturbances diminish cognitive functions, can worsen existing mental health symptoms, and

may even initiate mental health problems. Sleep disturbances can lead to emotional reactivity, negative emotions, vulnerability to stress, hypervigilance, and decrease both physical and mental resilience. This can make it more difficult to handle daily difficulties, make good decisions, and maintain healthy habits.

Poor sleep is linked to mental distress and chronic insomnia can increase an individual's risk of developing depression and anxiety. Poor sleep is also strongly linked with suicidal ideation and an increased suicide risk.

In other words, sleep problems contribute to mental health problems and mental health problems contribute to sleep problems. Either of these can problems can worsen the other leading to a negative cycle. This creates an opportunity where treatment of sleep disorders may improve mental health as part of an overall treatment plan. Some sleep problems are highly treatable and there are strategies that can be taken on an individual level to improve the duration and quality of sleep. Changes in sleep hygiene may be enough to alleviate minor sleep issues. These changes can be done on a individual level and include the following.

- Maintain a sleep schedule by going to sleep and waking up at the same time each day.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol in the evening.
- Maintain a nighttime routine designed to improve relaxation and decrease stress.
- Exercise or engage in regular physical activity during the day.

- Dim the lights in the evening and avoid electronic devices before bed.
- Reduce disruptions by blocking light and noise out of the bedroom.

Not all sleep issues will lead to mental health problems, but they should all be taken seriously. Even seemingly minor sleep issues can impact physical and mental health and make it more difficult to cope with life's challenges. Basic changes to sleep hygiene, like the ones mentioned above, may be enough to provide for a more consistent good night's sleep for some individuals. However, more serious or chronic sleep problems may require additional interventions. Consult your doctor for chronic sleep problems to make sure that they do not stem from a physical issue.

There are other interventions that can improve sleep including cognitive behavioral therapy and medication. Chronic issues are a risk factor for mental health disorders and suicide, and should be treated by a professional.

If you feel that you experiencing poor mental health or that your mental health is affecting your ability to sleep, contact Valeo Behavioral Health Care at 785-233-1730.

## Valeo Behavioral Health Care (Adults)

Crisis Services  
400 SW Oakley  
Topeka, KS 66606  
24 Hour Crisis Line  
785-234-3300

## National Suicide Prevention Life Line

1-800-273-8255

## Shawnee County Suicide Prevention Coalition

SCSPC.org

## Family Service & Guidance Center (18 and under)

325 SW Frazier  
Topeka, KS 66606  
24 Hour Crisis Number  
785-232-5005

## Healing after Loss to Suicide Group (HeALS)

Sandy Reams – Group Facilitator  
Topeka.Heals@gmail.com  
785-249-3792

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EXPERIENCE MENTAL  
ILLNESS EACH YEAR.

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