

Could you be overdoing it with sleeping pills?

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(HealthDay)—More Americans are having trouble getting a good night's sleep, a national health survey found.

And the number of people who use prescription sleeping pills in the quest for shuteye continues to increase—currently about 4 percent of Americans, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But are they safe? And are they even effective?

Results of studies done on the [health hazards](#) of sleeping pills vary widely, from one that found barely any elevated risk to another that found the risk of death for users is three times higher than it is for people who don't take them.

Research published in the *American Journal of Public Health* confirms that fatal overdoses are a concern. There are also possible side effects and dependency problems to consider.

Plus, according to *Consumer Reports*, over the long term, sleeping pills might not even bring their intended results.

If you're taking sleeping pills, it's important to only use them with your doctor's OK and according to his or her instructions. If you take them too often, they can actually make your [sleep problems](#) worse.

So, how can you know if you're abusing sleeping pills? Here are some warning signs:

- You're taking extra doses to see if that works better, or a second [pill](#) in the middle of the night if you wake up.
- You're taking a prescription sleeping pill AND an over-the-counter sedation product at the same time.
- You're using sleeping pills to treat anxiety.
- You're taking sleeping pills during the day or when you need to be alert.

- You've taken a sleeping pill every night for more than 7 to 10 days, or several times a week for weeks or months.

If you have any of these red flags, it's time to talk to your doctor about a new plan for getting quality sleep, including regular exercise and cognitive behavior therapy to harness the power of your mind.

More information: *Consumer Reports* has a look at [sleeping pills](#) and strategies for getting a good night's sleep.

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