# Overview: Sleep-Wake Disorders

Poor sleep can affect mental health and recovery, but it doesn't explain addiction. Learn why.

## What Are Sleep-Wake Disorders?

**Sleep-Wake Disorders** are conditions characterized by disturbances in the quality, timing, or amount of sleep that cause significant distress and impairment in daily functioning. These are clinical disorders—not simply "poor sleep habits"—with profound effects on mood, cognition, and physical health. For families, sleep disturbance often predicts relapse most reliably.

## Understanding Sleep-Wake Disorders

### Insomnia Disorder

Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early despite adequate opportunity for sleep. This is the most common sleep disorder in addiction.

- Lying awake for hours despite exhaustion, or waking repeatedly
- Early morning waking with racing thoughts and anxiety
- Using alcohol, benzodiazepines, or cannabis to "get some sleep"

### Hypersomnolence Disorder

Excessive sleepiness despite adequate sleep, with daytime sleep episodes or difficulty being fully awake after waking.

- Sleeping 10+ hours yet still needing multiple daytime naps
- Prolonged grogginess, confusion, or disorientation upon waking
- Using stimulants like amphetamines or caffeine to be functional

**Prevalence:**
**36-91%** of individuals with alcohol use disorder experience insomnia[1]

**Relapse Risk:**
**Significant**
Sleep disturbance is a high predictor of relapse[2]

**Persistence:**
**2 Years**
Sleep dysfunction can persist up to 2 years in recovery[3]

***Sources:*** *[1] Sleep Management among Patients with Substance Use Disorders (Chakravorty et al., 2018), PMC. [2] Sleep Disturbance in Substance Use Disorders (Roehrs & Roth, 2015), PMC. [3] Sleep Management among Patients with Substance Use Disorders (Chakravorty et al., 2018), PMC*

### Circadian Rhythm Sleep-Wake Disorders

Misalignment between the body's internal clock and required sleep-wake schedule. The sleep itself may be normal—but it occurs at the wrong times.

- Unable to fall asleep until 3-4 a.m., then unable to wake for obligations
- Sleep schedule that shifts later each night or reverses day and night
- Using substances to force sleep or stay awake during required hours

## How Sleep-Wake Disorders Contribute to Relapse

Sleep disturbance is the only withdrawal symptom shared by every class of addictive substance—alcohol, opioids, stimulants, cannabis, and sedatives all disrupt sleep during use and withdrawal.

1) **Sleep Deprivation Impairs Judgment**
   Chronic exhaustion degrades the executive functions needed to resist cravings.
2) **Substances Become a Sleep Aid**
   Alcohol and sedatives provide temporary relief, but ultimately worsen sleep architecture.
3) **Without Treating Sleep Disorders, Relapse Is Likely**
   Insomnia can persist for months or years into recovery.

> *"Sleep disturbance is the only withdrawal symptom that appears with every substance class. It's also one of the strongest predictors of relapse. Treating sleep disorders is essential to preventing relapse."*
>
> **Dr. Leslie Secrest, MD**
> *Medical Director, Burning Tree Ranch*

## How Sleep-Wake Disorders Are Identified & Diagnosed

- Assessment during sustained abstinence to separate substance use from underlying disorders
- History examining whether sleep problems predated substance use or persisted during sobriety
- Evaluation of symptom severity, co-occurring conditions, and functional impairment

## Long-Term Treatment for Sleep-Wake Disorders and Addiction

Sleep disorders and substance use disorders reinforce each other through shared brain chemistry. Recovery requires time for both conditions to be properly diagnosed, treated, and stabilized. Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the extended structure needed for genuine healing.

1) **Time for Sleep Architecture to Heal**
   Restoration needs sustained sobriety measured in months, not weeks.
2) **Accurate Diagnosis Requires Extended Observation**
   It takes time to separate sleep disorders from symptoms of SUD.
3) **Measuring Progress by Sleep Quality, Not Days**
   Clients advance when sleep normalizes, not when a set date arrives.

### Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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