

# Sleeping & Aging

by: **Mary Bounds**  
**Lifestyle Magazine**

Many older adults face a new-onset, pesky condition commonly known as insomnia. While it is no laughing matter, insomnia is often thought of as an insignificant, temporary nuisance. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Sleep is necessary for the body to rest, repair and reinforce systems for the next day. Without adequate sleep the body and mind deplete reserves, causing a cascade of maladies. In fact, research has rebuked the myth that sleep loss has no adverse health effects. Less than 7 hours of sleep a night can negatively affect the cardiovascular, endocrine, immune and nervous systems.

Adults in their 50's and beyond face new challenges when it comes to sleeping. Aging can lead to physical pain and other conditions which directly disrupt sleep. Older adults may worry about major changes in their work, finances and health, leaving them wide awake in the wee hours of the night. Whatever the reason, there are ways to combat insomnia and regain control. Here are a few:

Conditions which interfere with sleep such as sleep apnea and restless legs syndrome are more likely to occur in older adults. A sleep specialist who is trained to diagnose and treat sleep disorders can offer help with proper medications, CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure), and other therapies.

Aging adults face many changes such as altered living arrangements or limited financial resources. This can trigger enormous stress which destroys restful sleep. Consult a counselor (family or financial) to discuss lifestyle changes, then develop a personal plan to manage stress more effectively.

Serious and chronic illnesses can negatively affect sleep. Arthritis, heart failure, COPD, and enlarged prostate make sleeping difficult. Medical professionals can prescribe treatment for pain, shortness of breath and urinary frequency so one can rest well at night. (Note: Some medication can interfere with sleep, so let your physician know when insomnia is an issue.)

Dietary choices often play havoc on sleep. Avoid spicy foods, caffeine and chocolate late in the day. Instead of a big meal have smaller snacks in the evening. Although the occasional "night cap" may leave one drowsy, alcohol actually interferes with regular sleep patterns. Avoid alcohol for two hours before bedtime.

Retirement frequently means more down-

time and less physical activity. This can change one's sleep-wake schedule as well as lead to depression. Consider a new hobby, join a class, or get a part time job. Add mild exercise to the daily routine. Getting up and out can do a world of good for mind, body and sleep!

With proper treatment, diet, and activity insomnia can be a thing of the past. Rest assured.

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