

Get a Good Night's Sleep

Sleeping and Older Adults



Expected Changes in Sleep Patterns in Older Adults

Sleep patterns change throughout the years.

Older adults are more likely to:

- Need about the same amount of sleep as middle age adults.
- Take longer to fall asleep.
- Sleep more lightly.
- Wake more often especially in the second half of the night.
- Stay awake for longer periods.
- Nap during the day.

It is also common for older adults to be ready for sleep earlier in the evening and wake up earlier in the morning.

These changes are normal.

It does not mean you need to take a sleeping pill.

Use the diaries in the booklet to track your sleep and daytime activities.

What kind of sleep problems do older adults have?

- Check all that apply to you.
- Trouble falling asleep - lying in bed for more than 30 minutes without being able to fall asleep.
- Trouble staying asleep—waking up often during the night.
- Waking in the early hours of the morning before you need to get up, and not being able to fall back asleep.
- Feeling very sleepy during the day
- Feeling the urge to nap during the day.
- Feeling like you have very little or no energy to do everyday activities.
- Have behaviours that interfere with sleep such as snoring, teeth-grinding, restless legs, sleep walking, and trouble breathing.
- Sleeping too much or for too long.

Read on to learn how to manage some of these problems.

How to get to sleep and sleep soundly

Encourage a better sleep at night.

- Use your bedroom only for sleeping and sex.
- Make sure your room is quiet, dark, and cool. If you need to block out light, try a sleep mask.
- Make sure your bed is comfortable.
- Turn off the TV or computer at least one hour before bed.
- Move bedroom clocks out of your view.
- Try not to worry about your sleep. Playing mental games can help redirect your thinking.
- If other worries are keeping you awake, write them down.



Have a regular bedtime routine.

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends.
- Do the same things each night to tell your body it is time to slow down.
- Get yourself ready to sleep with 20 to 30 minutes of relaxation such as soft music, meditation, deep breathing, yoga, or a warm bath (see page 13 -14).
- Eat a light snack such as warm milk, cereal, crackers, or yogurt.
- For 2 to 4 hours before bedtime, be careful what you do, eat, and drink.
 - Larger or spicy meals can cause indigestion or discomfort.
 - Sleep can be disturbed by alcohol, anything with caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate), and the nicotine in cigarettes.
 - Drinking liquids before bed means getting up in the night to go to the bathroom.
 - Strenuous exercise right before bed can keep you from falling asleep.

Carbohydrates help you sleep. Proteins can keep you awake.

Make daytime habits for better sleep.

- Keep your activity level up with social activities.
- Exercise regularly for at least 30 minutes each day.
- Expose yourself to sunlight for up to 2 hours each day by going outside, opening your curtains, sitting in a sunny spot inside or outside, or use a light therapy box.
- Set aside time for problem solving early in the day so that you don't carry your worries to bed.
- If you can, try not to sleep during the day. If you do nap, nap in the morning or early in the afternoon (before 3:00PM), and set an alarm so you wake after 20 minutes.
- Try not to go to bed too early in the evening.

Talk to your pharmacist or doctor if you think your medicines are disturbing your sleep.

Remember

The number of hours you sleep is not as important as whether or not you feel refreshed in the morning.

Remind yourself - it takes time to change sleep behaviors and see positive results.

If you cannot sleep within 20 to 30 minutes

- Get out of bed and do something relaxing:
 - Listen to soft music.
 - Read.
 - Take a warm bath.
 - Drink a warm drink (but caffeine-free).
 - Meditate.
- Go back to bed once you feel sleepy.

Be consistent with this strategy. Studies show it is very effective in reversing sleep problems. Even though it may feel worse at first and you might have a few sleepless nights, **it will improve!**

Do not take any kind of sleeping medicine. They are not wise choices for older adults.

Speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner, or pharmacist if:

- You continue to have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep.
- You are so tired during the day that you cannot function normally.

Daytime Activities Diary

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Exercise What did you do? When? For how long?			
Naps When? Where? How long?			
Alcohol and Caffeine What? When? How much?			
Feelings Happy? Sad? Stressed? Cause?			
Sleep aids or medicines What? When? How much?			
Bedtime routine Relaxation? How long?			
Bed Time			

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Sleep Diary

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Wake up time			
Time in bed not sleeping What did you do?			
Breaks in sleep Wake up? Get up? What did you do?			
Quality of sleep Good? Restful? Not well?			
Comments about sleep			
Total Sleep hours			

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Sleep Diary

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Wake up time			
Time in bed not sleeping What did you do?			
Breaks in sleep Wake up? Get up? What did you do?			
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Comments about sleep			
Total Sleep hours			

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Activities to help you relax

These are just some examples. There are many others.

Soft, slow music

Massage

Yoga

Tai Chi

Walking in nature

Sewing or knitting

Prayer

Meditation

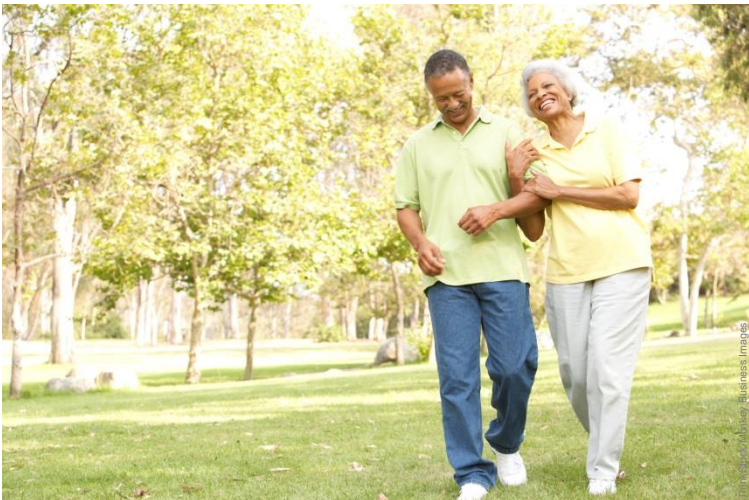
Pets

Reading

Cuddling

Laughing and having fun

Imagery or visualization



Relaxation Methods

There are a number of books and web sites that teach relaxation. Not all methods work for all people. Do what works for you!

One way to relax - Slow Breathing

1. Find a quiet spot.
2. Sit or lie in a comfortable, relaxed position.
3. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose.
4. Hold your breath.
5. Count to 4 at 1 second intervals (one one thousand, two one thousand, etc.).
6. Slowly breathe out through your mouth.
7. Let your chest and stomach muscles relax. If you are sitting, drop your shoulders.
8. Repeat for the next 3 to 5 minutes.

As you breathe in and out, try one of the following:

- Think of a single word such as P-E-A-C-E or C-A-L-M.
- Say “breathe in” as you are breathing in and “breathe out” as you are breathing out.
- Imagine yourself in your favorite place.

You might want to put on some soft music at the same time.

To learn more about sleep and aging

Books: Ask your local Librarian

Online:

- Here to Help www.heretohelp.bc.ca
Go to Quick Links at the bottom of the page.
Select 'Wellness Modules'. Scroll down to and click on 'Getting a Good Night's Sleep'.
- National Sleep Foundation, USA
www.sleepfoundation.org

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