

A Senior's Guide to Sleeping Well

As a doctor, I can tell you that the idea that you need less sleep as you get older is a myth. However, the way you sleep does change!

In our senior years, we're likely to wake up earlier and feel sleepy long before our usual bedtime. We'll experience fewer hours of deep sleep, and we may get up more often during the night.



Many adults adapt easily to this natural transition, but others need more help. About 40% of the elderly report having at least one symptom of insomnia at least a few nights each week, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

Figure out what's keeping you up at night. Learn more about common sleep issues that affect seniors, along with suggestions for overcoming them.

Strategies for Age-Related Sleep Issues

Many of the physical and social changes associated with aging can affect your sleep.

Be prepared for these new challenges with these tips:

1. **Manage chronic conditions.** Conditions such as arthritis can interfere with your sleep, and **lack of sleep can aggravate your symptoms.** Break the cycle by following your doctor's recommendations consistently.
2. **Treat apnea.** If you snore loudly, you may have sleep apnea, a temporary cessation in breathing. Age and obesity increase your risk, but there are effective treatments, including continuous positive airway pressure devices that help keep your respiratory tract open.



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3. **Monitor movement disorders.** Many seniors also develop restless leg syndrome and other movement disorders. **Home remedies like stretching and massage may relieve minor symptoms**, and doctors may prescribe medication for more serious cases.
4. **Exercise regularly.** Working out will help relieve insomnia and many other effects of aging. Find a variety of safe activities you enjoy or take group classes designed for seniors.
5. **Stay engaged.** Mutually supportive relationships and enriching hobbies will also help to keep you fit. Volunteer in your community and spend time with family and friends.
6. **Talk with your doctor.** Let your doctor know about any concerns you have. Keep a journal so you can share relevant information about your sleep habits.



Strategies for General Sleep Issues

Sleep may be even more important for your physical and mental health as you grow older. Review your basic daily habits so you can make positive changes.

Try these ideas:

1. **Darken your bedroom.** Shutting out bright lights helps your brain to become drowsy. Turn off the TV at least one hour before bed and use night lights if you get up to use the bathroom.
2. **Block out noise. As you age, you may become more sensitive to noise, as well as light.** Use a fan or white noise machine to mask car stereos and garbage trucks.
3. **Try naps.** Changing hormone levels reduce the time that seniors spend in the most restful stages of deep sleep. You may be able to compensate by going to bed earlier or taking daytime naps. Remember that brief naps early in the day are less likely to interfere with your overnight slumber.



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4. **Eat light.** Losing excess weight and eating a diet rich in whole foods will enhance your sleep and overall fitness. Enjoy a small bedtime snack if it helps you sleep but avoid anything spicy or high in fat.



5. **Limit alcohol. Substances like alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine disrupt sleep,** and aging bodies are more sensitive to the effects. If you want a nightcap, drink plain water or herbal tea.

6. **Rest and relax.** Brooding about insomnia can make you too anxious to sleep. If you're tossing and turning, try meditating or slowly counting down from 100.

Simple lifestyle changes are usually all you need to stay well rested at any age. If you still have trouble sleeping or feel tired during the day on a regular basis, ask your doctor about what treatments are right for you.

About the author



Dr. Rich Parenti is a retired chiropractor, a former high school science teacher, and he is a US Air Force veteran. As the principal licensed agent at Seniors Covered in Philadelphia, PA he has been helping senior citizens since 2016 throughout the United States.

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