

SLEEPING ISN'T SO SIMPLE

For Seniors, It Can Be A Daily Chore

The typical person spends about 1/3 of their lifetime snoozing. That means a 75 year old person enjoys 25 years of blissful, regenerative slumber. Well, some do and some do not. There are 35 million+ Americans who do not sleep well.

Many of these people are seniors. As humans age, their sleep patterns change and sleep satisfaction decreases. It is estimated that 50% of people over the age of 65 are affected by disturbances in their sleep. And quality of sleep is not the only issue for seniors. Some struggle getting to sleep. About 36% of the women and 13% of the men claim it takes them more than 30 minutes to fall asleep.

Experience doesn't seem to make us better at this daily task. We start life effortlessly enjoying about 16 hours of sleep per day. After years of practice, many seniors struggle to attain the 7-9 hours they need.



An uncomfortable bed is one controllable element that can lead to poor sleep. Noise levels, caffeine and alcohol intake, choice and dosage of medications, and room temperature are some others.

STAGES

There are 2 primary stages of normal sleep. The first stage is called non rapid-eye movement and is commonly known as NREM sleep. The second stage is called rapid-eye movement and is commonly known as REM sleep.

- [1] **NREM** - This stage is divided into 4 stages, during which respiration, heart rate and blood pressure decrease. Stages 3 and 4, are known as delta sleep and are the deepest levels of sleep. NREM is also, known as slow wave sleep (SWS).
- [2] **REM** - This is the more active stage and is when dreaming occurs. Respiration, heart rate and blood pressure are similar to being awake. REM sleep takes up 15-20% of the total sleep time. It runs in cycles of about 90 minutes, with the duration of each cycle increasing throughout the night.

REM sleep stays relatively stable as we age. However, seniors spend less time in the delta sleep stages of NREM.

COMMON EFFECTS OF AGE

- ◆ It takes longer to fall asleep, more so for women than men.
- ◆ Time in bed increases after the age of 65.
- ◆ Sleep becomes lighter and more fragmented. As a result, less time is spent in the delta levels of sleep.
- ◆ Awakenings become more common due to increased susceptibility to noise and other sensitivities to environmental stimuli.
- ◆ Time sleeping decreases until we reach 80 years of age, then increases slightly.
- ◆ Changes in the circadian rhythms moves the sleeping pattern ahead, so seniors tend to go to bed earlier and awaken earlier.
- ◆ Naps are more common. This can make falling asleep at night more difficult.
- ◆ The chance of respiratory disorders, including sleep apnea, increases.

(Sources: Amer. Fed. For Aging Research, National Sleep Foundation, Mayo Clinic)



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