



Catching Your 40 Winks

It is amazing how much of a fight little kids can put up when it is time to go to sleep. As one gets older and schedules get more hectic, sleep becomes a luxury that one can never seem to get enough of. Then finally, when a person moves into more advanced age and schedules may free up a little more, the time to sleep is there, but the ability to get a good night's sleep may be lacking. *Are you having trouble falling and staying asleep at night?*

To attain healthy aging, experts contend that senior citizens need seven to eight hours of sleep a night. However, many older people don't automatically fall asleep when their heads hit the pillow, as they may have done in their younger days. Studies have shown that 36% of women and 13% of men over the age of 65 need more than 30 minutes to fall asleep. Dr. James Krainson of the South Florida Sleep Diagnostic Center in Miami, and the spokesperson for the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, says that the causes of sleep disturbances are usually underlying health issues, such as pain from arthritis, or urological, psychological, neurological, and cardiovascular disturbances. Dr. Krainson goes on to suggest other possible reasons for disruptions in an older person's sleep patterns. These may include an older person being more sensitive to things such as noise in their environment, causing them to awaken more easily, or a decreased secretion of melatonin, the hormone which produces sleep. Researchers have also found that better sleeping habits are reported by people without major psychiatric or medical illnesses.

Dr. Krainson reports that the most common sleep disorders in older adults include obstructive sleep apnea (which can elevate the risk for stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure, and cognitive problems), insomnia (which affects almost half of adults 60 and older), periodic limb movement disorder (which causes a jerk in the legs every 20-40 seconds of sleep and is seen in almost 40% of the older adults), and restless leg syndrome (which is an uncomfortable feeling in the legs, affecting more than 20% of people 80 years and up).

Researcher Rebecca Bernert of Florida State University has concluded from her study that self reported sleep disturbances may serve as a warning sign for increased suicide risk. Sleep disturbances, independent of depression, predicted a greater chance of an older person committing suicide. Poor nighttime sleep can cause older adults to experience excessive daytime sleepiness, suffer from a depressed mood, have memory and attention problems, and be at risk for more nighttime falls.

A separate study published by researchers at the University of California, San

Diego, School of Medicine published their findings in the March issue of CHEST, showing a link between sleep disturbance and heart disease. A positive correlation was found between higher levels of compounds in the blood that are markers for clotting and spontaneous sleep disturbances. Heart disease can be predicted by increased clotting in the blood. This study showed the results in healthy young adults, and Dr. Joel E. Dimsdale from UCSD warns that sleep disruption in the elderly should be taken very seriously because they are even more vulnerable than the younger adults who participated in the study.

In 2006, the International Longevity Center – USA published a report titled, *The Role of Sleep in Healthy Aging*. Included in the report were recommendations for healthful sleep hygiene. For example, some behaviors advised against are not to exercise within 4 hours of going to bed, not to drink caffeinated drinks at least 6 hours before going to bed, not go to bed either too hungry or too full, and not to take a nap lasting more than 30 minutes during the day. Elderly people are encouraged to go to bed at the same time each night and to get out of bed the same time each morning, take part in some physical activity (outdoor if possible), and keep the bedroom dark, quiet, and cool. If they cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, it is advised to get out of bed and read something until they feel sleepy.

Comment: Older adults

Sleep is a necessity of life, from the newborn infant to the elderly person. As older people lose their ability to sleep as soundly as they once may have, it is critical to promote healthy behaviors that help to ensure a more restful sleep, which in turn contributes to healthy aging. Sweet dreams!

Comment: Personalize: as "you" lose

Comment: Mention napping;

Comment: Include resources available