

SLEEP AS WE GROW OLDER

Although sleep patterns change, adequate sleep is an essential part of physical and emotional health at every stage of life. According to research, more than half of all people over the age of 65 experience disturbed sleep. For some, these disturbances may center on difficulty with sleep while others may have trouble with mood or performance during the day.

As the body ages, individuals become less skilled at maintaining sound sleep, and older people are more likely to sleep less in one stretch than they did when they were younger. Although older people spend about the same amount of time in rapid eye movement (REM) sleep as younger people, they get less of the deeper stages of sleep they need and awaken more often.

For older adults, trouble sleeping can stem from simple and correctable causes, such as consuming too much caffeine or exercising too late in the day, to more complex causes, including hospitalization and stress. As bodies age, individuals are more likely to develop chronic medical illnesses that interfere with sleep. Additionally, the overuse of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications to treat these illnesses contributes to problematic sleep. Depression, which is more common with age, and the loss of a loved one also contribute to poor sleep and disorders, including insomnia and excessive daytime sleepiness.

Older individuals whom experience trouble sleeping should consult their health care provider for treatment options, which range from behavioral modifications to medication and surgical options. Practitioners offer these tips to older adults to ensure sound sleep:

- Stay active. Studies suggest exercise and exposure to sunlight can be helpful in regulating sleep.
- Reduce intake of beverages. Both caffeine and alcohol disturb sleep.
- Consider naps. Practitioners used to discourage napping as they believed the practice disturbed nighttime sleep. However, naps, limited to no longer than 30 minutes, can be helpful to ensuring a restful night.
- Consult your doctor. Review your diagnosed illnesses and prescribed medications with your health care provider to ensure these conditions are not disturbing sleep.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine is a professional organization dedicated to advancing sleep health care by setting clinical standards for the field; advocating for recognition, diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders; educating professionals dedicated to providing optimal sleep health care; and fostering the development and application of scientific knowledge.

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SLEEP STATISTICS

More than half of all people over the age of 65 experience disturbed sleep**

People over the age of 65 make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population, but consume more than **30 percent** of prescription drugs and **40 percent** of sleeping pills**

Each year, sleep disorders, sleep deprivation and sleepiness add an estimated **\$15.9 billion** to the national health care bill**

The International Classification of Sleep Disorders lists **84 sleep disorders** of sleep and wakefulness that serve as a guide for diagnosis

For a complete list of AASM-accredited sleep centers, visit www.aasmnet.org or call (888) 41-AWAKE

**Statistic from the National Institutes of Health National Center for Sleep Disorder Research

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