# WOMEN AND SLEEP

Getting enough sleep is important for general well being, but as women often tackle multiple responsibilities, including home, work and family, sleep is paramount as it affects concentration, job performance and social interaction. For years, little research has been available concerning the sleep problems unique to women. However, recent studies have shed light on sleep patterns, needs and problems particular to women.

Women of all ages experience troubled sleep. Most young women often trade sleep for a fast-paced lifestyle, which leads to sleep disorders, including fatigue, insomnia and excessive daytime sleepiness. As women age, physical, emotional and hormonal changes, including lessened deep sleep and depression, affect sleep. The menstrual cycle, pregnancy and menopause alter women's sleep patterns and may contribute to sleep disorders.

The menstrual cycle causes changes in the sleep pattern, , and women, as a result, experience excessive daytime sleepiness, fatigue, longer sleeping hours, increased awakenings, and frequent vivid dreams. To alleviate the discomfort caused by the disorders of sleep, practitioners suggest women maintain a regular sleep/wake schedule, eat a healthy diet and reduce stress.

The sleeping patterns of most women change during pregnancy. An increase in the hormone progesterone causes sleep problems, including daytime fatigue and the need for extended periods of nighttime sleep. Later in pregnancy, women often experience a decrease in the amount of slow-wave sleep (deep stages of sleep) and an increase in the number of awakenings. Sleep efficiency is also disrupted by physical stresses, including leg cramps, backaches, heartburn, fetus movement and increased urination.

The natural aging process causes changes in sleep. Changes in sex hormone levels directly affect sleep, resulting in daytime fatigue, insomnia, and irritability. Physical changes, including increased heart rate, anxiety and hot flashes, also contribute to sleep disturbances during menopause. To alleviate sleep problems during menopause, heath care providers suggest women control their bedroom's temperature, eliminate caffeine and alcohol from their diet, and consider hormone replacement therapy.

While occasional sleep disturbances are common and do not require medical attention, women with more severe sleep problems should consult a health care professional to receive a diagnosis and learn treatment options.

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.

© AASM 2003

**SLEEP STATISTICS**

Women are **twice** as likely as men to have difficulty falling and staying asleep**

More than **70 million** Americans suffer from disorders of sleep and wakefulness**

Of the 70 million, nearly **60 percent** have a chronic disorder**

Research suggests that adults require an average of **8 to 8.5 hours** of sleep each night**

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

One Westbrook Corporate Center, Suite 920
Westchester, IL 60154
(708) 492-0930
www.aasmnet.org