



Are Sleep Disorders Keeping You Awake at Night?

Sleep disorders in the elderly involve any disrupted sleep pattern, such as problems falling or staying asleep, too much sleep, or abnormal behaviors with sleep. Sleep problems are common in the elderly. In general, older people need 30 to 60 minutes less sleep than younger people. Their sleep is less deep and more choppy than sleep in younger people. A healthy 70 year old may wake up four times during the night without it being due to disease.

If you have a primary sleep disorder, you may have trouble falling asleep, wake up frequently throughout the night, and feel excessively tired during the day. Primary sleep disorders include:

- § *Sleep apnea*, which causes brief interruptions in breathing while sleeping. Snoring is also common in individuals with this disorder.
- § *Restless legs syndrome*, causes discomfort in the legs and a strong urge to walk around
- § *Periodic limb movement disorder*, causes muscle contractions and movement of the arms and legs during sleep
- § *Circadian rhythm sleep disorders*, a variety of conditions that affect the body's waking and sleeping cycle
- § *REM-behavior disorder*, a rare condition that causes thrashing and other movements during sleep

Methods to promote healthy sleep habits: try sleeping in a quiet place and drinking a glass of warm milk before bed. Also, avoid large meals shortly before bedtime; avoid stimulants such as caffeine; get regular exercise early in the day; go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and do a quiet activity such as reading or listening to music.

NOTE: Avoid using sleeping pills to help you sleep. They can lead to dependence and can make sleep problems worse over time if you don't use them correctly. Your health care provider should assess your risks of daytime sleepiness, mental (cognitive) side effects, and falls before you begin taking sleep medications.

Causes or Contributors to Sleep Disturbances in Older adults

- Alzheimer's disease
- Alcohol
- Changes in the body's natural internal clock
- Chronic disease
- Certain medicines, herbs and supplements
- Depression
- Neurological conditions
- Not being very active
- Pain caused by diseases such as arthritis
- Stimulants such as caffeine
- Urination at night