



Sleep

Sleep, marvelous sleep. It's one of those things you might take for granted—that is, until it eludes you.

How much sleep is needed varies greatly by age and from individual to individual. Newborns can sleep away three-fourths of the day. Toddlers and preschoolers need 11 to 14 hours of sleep each day. This need gradually declines until adulthood, when most people require around 7 to 8 hours—although seniors may find their sleeping patterns fluctuate due to changes associated with aging.

Unfortunately, seniors aren't the only ones who struggle with a sound night's sleep. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 70 million Americans experience insomnia. That means they have trouble falling or staying asleep, or they wake up before they've gotten enough sleep.

You might find your sleep interrupted by night sweats during menopause. Or, a bed partner's snoring might irk you. Still others have conditions such as sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome. A serious breathing disorder, apnea is marked by loud snoring and periods when breathing briefly stops. Restless legs syndrome is a neurological disorder that causes uncomfortable sensations in the legs. Seek treatment for problems like these.

No matter the cause, it can't hurt to discuss your sleep problems with your doctor or me. I can go over the list of medications or supplements you're taking to see if any could be interfering with your sleep. Some common culprits are antihistamines, antihypertensives, beta-blockers, and hormones. Even common pain relievers can pose a problem since many contain caffeine. But don't stop taking any prescription medications without discussing this first with your doctor.

You can do many other things to improve your sleep. For starters, keep regular bed and wake times, even on the weekend. And use your bedroom only for sleep.

To prepare your body for sleep, avoid stimulating activities and substances during the evening hours. This includes alcohol, heaving eating—especially spicy or high-sugar foods—fluids, nicotine, or caffeine. Be sure to exercise, but do it at least a few hours before you go to sleep. Make the time right before bed really relaxing—with calming activities and soft lighting. A bubble bath by candlelight, perhaps?

Wearing earplugs or eye masks or using a fan, or heavy curtains may also create an environment more conducive to sleep. If you use night-lights, make sure they're not too bright.

If all else fails, talk with your doctor about other ways to promote sleep, such as relaxation techniques or behavioral therapy. Sleep aids such as valerian or melatonin might help, but know that these are not regulated the way medications are.

Sleep medications may be an option if your insomnia is interfering with your daily activities. Your doctor or I can discuss potential choices. Hypnotics are prescription medications that promote sleep. Antidepressants are best used only if depression is a problem. Anxiolytics can ease anxiety that may be interfering with sleep. Seek advice before considering either prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) sleep medications. And be sure to discuss any troubling side effects that occur.



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or mcglynnrx@tds.net

Thanks, Dan McGlynn