

# MANAGING SLEEP IN OLDER ADULTS

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,  
AND CAREGIVERS



## READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- What Causes Sleeping Problems in Older Adults.
- About Types of Sleeping Problems and Disorders.
- How you can Help Manage Sleeping Problems.



**Sinai  
Health**

Healthy Ageing  
and Geriatrics

## SLEEPING AS WE AGE

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As we get older, we may find it harder to fall and stay asleep. Many older adults may feel less satisfied with the sleep they are getting and feel more tired during the day. The lack of quality sleep can affect your energy, emotions, and overall health.



There are steps you can take to help you get the rest you need, and feel less tired during the day.

Read this pamphlet to see what you can do to help better manage your sleeping patterns.

## ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

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Sleeping patterns are different for each person. Although it is recommended that adults get 7 - 9 hours of sleep a night, there is no "right amount" of sleep. As we get older, our sleeping needs change. You may need to sleep less and feel just as rested.

You can tell if you are experiencing sleep problems if:

- You have trouble falling asleep at night
- You have trouble falling back asleep if you have woken up during the night
- You wake up constantly during the night
- Your sleep feels light
- You feel tired during the day
- You have difficulty concentrating throughout the day
- You have low energy and do not feel rested

If you feel this regularly and are not getting the rest you need, you may have a sleeping problem.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SLEEPING PROBLEMS?

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Some sleeping problems are temporary and may be caused by stress or other factors.

If you notice your sleep problems are regularly occurring and interfere with your everyday life, you may have a sleeping disorder.

## COMMON REASONS FOR SLEEPING PROBLEMS

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Being less active during the day can throw off your sleep-wake schedule, as you will be less tired and therefore less sleepy at night.

- Drinking caffeinated beverages including coffee, tea, or soft drinks, which can keep you up at night. Chocolate also has caffeine and can affect your sleep.
- Some medications might keep you from falling or staying asleep. Talk to your healthcare providers to see if your medications may be interacting with your sleep schedule.
- Irregular sleeping patterns including napping during the day may cause sleeping problems because you are less tired at night.
- Psychological problems or psychiatric disorders may cause stress and sleep problems.
- Other health conditions may contribute to waking up during the night. For example, congestive heart failure, obstructive sleep apnea and urinary incontinence.



# COMMON SLEEPING DISORDERS

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Insomnia is the inability to sleep or feel rested and refreshed. Insomnia may be chronic (experiencing symptoms more than three times per week for over three months) or acute (lasting less than three months). It can be caused by stress, anxiety, depression or other underlying health conditions.

You should speak to your health care provider about insomnia symptoms to assess how serious a problem it is and how you can treat it.

Sleep apnea is often associated with high blood pressure and other health problems. With sleep apnea, breathing stops - sometimes for as long as 10-60 seconds and the amount of oxygen in the blood drops. This will occur repeatedly, causing multiple sleep disruptions throughout the night. This can lead to you feeling sleepless and less rested throughout the day.

Sleep apnea puts you at risk for cardiovascular disease, headaches, memory loss and depression. If you have the symptoms of sleep apnea, speak to your health care professional for treatment.

## **IDENTIFY UNDERLYING PROBLEMS:**

Many cases of sleeping problems and disorders are caused by underlying but treatable causes. Ask yourself these questions if you are experiencing regular sleeping disruptions and bring your answers to your health care provider:

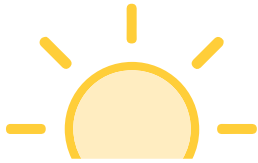
- Are you under a lot of stress?
- Are you depressed?
- Do you feel anxious or worried?
- Are you taking any medications that may disrupt your sleep?
- Do you have any health problems interfering with sleep?

## SLEEPING WELL IS MORE CHALLENGING AS YOU AGE

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As we get older, we may find it harder to fall and stay asleep. Many older adults may feel less satisfied with the sleep they are getting and feel more tired during the day. The lack of quality sleep can affect your energy, emotions, and overall health.

### DURING THE DAY



- Avoid large meals and drinking fluids a few hours before bedtime.
- Limit or eliminate alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine.
- Exercise regularly but not within 2 hours of your bedtime.
- Get adequate exposure to bright light during the day.
- Avoid napping.
- Get out of bed at the same time each morning.

## HOURS OF SLEEP

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There is no “right amount” of sleep. As we get older, our sleeping needs change. You may need to sleep less and feel just as rested.

### DURING THE NIGHT



- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and cool to keep comfortable throughout the night.
- If it helps, use soothing noise (e.g. a fan, other appliance, “white noise” machine).
- Remove electronics from the room.
- Develop a sleep ritual (same routine each night before going to bed). Go to bed at same time, preferably when tired.
- If possible, avoid using sleeping aids and pills to help you sleep as many of these can increase your risk of falls.

# SLEEPING AIDS FOR OLDER ADULTS

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## **SLEEPING PILLS:**

It is always best to manage your sleep with changes in your daily activities before using sleeping aids. Although prescription and non-prescription sleeping aids may help regulate your sleeping schedule, they can also have dangerous side effects and are not meant for long-term use. Many are also not as effective as we think they are. Those that contain diphenhydramine or dimenhydrinate can especially increase your risk of falls and dementia.



Always speak with your health care provider before taking any type of sleeping aid, including over-the-counter options.

## **MELATONIN:**

Melatonin is a hormone that helps control your sleep and wake cycles. Your brain naturally produces melatonin each night as it gets dark to help you become tired and go to sleep. Melatonin can be found in some foods (meats, grains, fruits, and vegetables) or supplements. Your health care provider may recommend adding melatonin to your diet to treat some sleeping problems. It is also considered much safer than sleeping aids. Talk to your health care provider to learn the right dosage amount, how to properly take it and whether melatonin is right for you.



## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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### CANADIAN SLEEP SOCIETY

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The Canadian Sleep Society (CSS/SCS) provides resources and information on how to improve your sleeping patterns. The CSS/SCS also offers a sleep clinic map to locate the nearest clinic in your area.



[www.css-scs.ca](http://www.css-scs.ca)

## RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

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- Living Longer, Living Well - Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Depression

### **ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:**

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

### **ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:**

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit [www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation](http://www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation) for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.



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