

Sleeping

During later life, sleep becomes shorter (about six hours, on average); there is less time spent in deep sleep; arousals during the night are more frequent and for longer periods of time; and there is a tendency to nap during the day.

Many factors may interfere with optimal sleep and wakefulness in older adults, and explain a significant proportion of this age-related increase in sleep difficulties. Acute and chronic illness, the side-effects of medication, mental health conditions, primary sleep disorders and abrupt, uncontrollable changes in both social and personal life may all contribute to the development of sleep difficulties in the elderly.

However, for many healthy older individuals, age-related sleep modifications may go unnoticed.

Tips to help you sleep soundly:

- A first step in the direction of better sleep is to know what interferes with it.
- Don't panic. Age-related sleep changes are normal, unless you feel a negative impact on your life.
- Discuss possible side-effects of medication with your pharmacist or doctor.
- If night sweats or hot flashes interfere with your sleep, discuss it with your doctor.
- Adopt a regular sleep/wake cycle, and sleep a sufficient number of hours every night. Older people may have more difficulties recovering after sleep deprivation.
- Reduce the intake of drugs and stimulants (caffeine, nicotine, alcohol) as much as possible.
- Create an optimum environment for sleep: a quiet and dark room, comfortable ambient temperature.

Healthy aging

body, mind and spirit



- If you experience jet lag, allow yourself time to adjust to the new time zone.
- Diminish stressful experiences and worries at bedtime as much as possible.
- Be active, eat well and exercise; good health is strongly associated with good sleep.
- Don't eat too much or exercise near bedtime.
- Try relaxation techniques to assist with physical and mental relaxation.
- The optimal duration for a nap during the daytime is 10-20 minutes. Otherwise, the time you spend napping during the day may take away from your total sleep time.
- Discuss sleep difficulties with your doctor. Let him/her know if you suspect that you have a primary sleep disorder, or if your medical and/or mental condition interferes with your sleep.

Source: Canadian Sleep Society www.css.to