Therapy
Professionals Ltd
Physio, Speech Language, Music,
Occupational Therapists & Dietitians

Having Trouble Sleeping as you Age

Many of us experience changes in our sleeping as we age. We may find it hard getting to and staying asleep, or waking early unrefreshed, making us feel sleepy and sluggish during the day. Research suggests most of the sleep problems among the elderly are because of physical and psychological health problems and the medications used to treat them. Lack of sleep contributes to falls, car accidents, sensitivity to pain and a poor quality of life.

The amount of sleep required by each person varies from 7-9 hours. It's not the time sleeping that matters, it's how you feel when you wake that's important. There are a number of stages to sleep, dreamless periods of light sleep and deep active dreaming sleep (REM sleep). This cycle is repeated several times during the night and although total sleep time tends to remain constant, as we age we spend more time in the lighter stages of sleep than in deep sleep, which is more refreshing. This contributes to wakefulness during the night. Generally as we age we go to bed earlier and wake earlier.

Here are a few tips to improve your sleep

1) Go to bed and get up about the same time every day.
2) Ensure you have a comfortable bed and bedding.
3) Have a bed time ritual that's relaxing eg reading, deep breathing, listening to music, having a hot bath or shower.
4) Have a cool, dark and quiet bedroom to sleep in.
5) If your partner snores wear earplugs.
6) Keep your bedroom for sleep and sex only (no screens).
7) Stop looking at screens (TV and computers) about an hour before going to bed (the light tricks your mind into believing it's day time).
8) Eat dinner at least three hours before bed. If you need a light snack avoid sweet snacks and those containing caffeine, instead have crackers and cheese or milk.
9) Don't drink after dinner and go to the loo before bed so you don't need to go through the night
10) Stop your caffeine intake at lunch time (coffee, fizzy drinks and chocolate).
11) Reduce your alcohol intake and stop at dinner time. If you're having a great deal of trouble with sleeping stop drinking alcohol.
12) Get some vigorous exercise during the day, early afternoon is best and not in the evening, as this will keep you awake.
13) Vitamin D helps with sleep. Ensure you get enough from sunlight, your diet or supplements.
14) If you have a bad night's sleep don't worry, just try and go to bed at your usual time the next night. This will help keep your circadian rhythm on track.

15) If you are still awake after 20 minutes get up and do something quiet like reading. Keep light to a minimum and return to bed when you feel sleepy.
16) If you need a nap during the day, do so early in the afternoon and for about 20 minutes.
17) Reduce the stress in your life and don't do anything that upsets you before bed.
18) Take any medication as and when prescribed.
19) If you have a health problem that interferes with your sleep eg Arthritic pain, reflux or a breathing problem, discuss this with your Doctor.

Still not sleeping

If after trying these tips for some weeks you're still not sleeping well talk to your Doctor as you may:

- need a review of your current medication
- have a sleep disorder like sleep apnoea or restless leg syndrome
- need better control of an existing physical or mental health issue
- need greater assistance with sleep from medication or cognitive behavioural therapy .

Sleeping is important for our overall functioning, so take the time to think about your sleeping habits.

Happy sleeping from the team at Therapy Professionals Ltd.

References:

Lecture by Dr Alex Bartle "Sleep Disorders In the Elderly"

https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/how-to-sleep-well-as-you-age.htm?pdf=13837