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# 60+ Still sleeping sound

By following good sleep habits even seniors can sleep well

In the later years of my mother's life, she complained that she could never sleep. However, once while sharing a bedroom with her, I learnt that her lack of sleep was simply not so. She snored almost the whole night. I learned a lesson; lack of sleep can be very real psychologically, but can also be a product of one's imagination.

## Rest needs activity

There are many myths about sleep and ageing. One of the traditional statements is that as you grow old, sleep adequacy suffers. You sleep less, it becomes more fragmented, you waken earlier, and you have less deep sleep. All wrong.

It is not because you are old that your sleep problems arise. It is because you've lost your physical relationship with your environ-

ment. We spend one third of our lives in the rest mode. The remainder is active. Activity needs rest. Rest needs activity, and when activity is taken out of the equation, rest suffers.

Physical activity acts as a control switch giving instructions and timetables to every organ of the body. Further, activity regulates the many circadian rhythms, which characterize all of our functions. Both the anatomy and function of sleep depends on the regular integration of waking and resting periods, interspersed. There must be a synergy between the two.

## Age, activity and sleep

Physical fitness is perhaps the strongest therapy and preventive for insomnia. As we age, we become less physically active and pay numerous costs for this degradation of our activity. As a result of not expending the energy in the daytime that will help us sleep at night, we gain weight. This weight gain can further aggravate our ability to sleep, because being overweight can increase the risk of sleep apnoea that prevents a restful night's sleep by obstructing our oxygen flow.

Our physical inactivity can cause a chain of reactions that progressively destroy our natural sleep order.

## Our body rhythm

Also part of our modern problem with sleep is that our body rhythms are tightly linked to the sun's consistent circuitry, its daily rhythm. For millions of years, we woke up when the sun was out and slept when it was dark. Electricity has conspired to change this natural cycle, and more technology only separates us further from one of our most-basic and natural rhythms.

Our addiction to the television set or the Internet are all threats to good sleep hygiene. They keep us up late, and prevent us from getting the rest-inducing physical activity we need. To sleep better, instead of turning on an electronic device to be entertained, try taking an after-dinner walk.

## Fatal mistake

Lack of sleep exacts severe penalties on all of our body systems. In laboratory experiments animals that are

## Quick sleep tips

Here are some ways to help you sleep well:

- 1 Stay fit.
- 2 Avoid taking regular sleeping medication; use pills as a last resort.
- 3 Have a routine—a regular sleeping and waking time, regular daytime activity—to keep you in rhythm.
- 4 Avoid all forms of caffeine at night.
- 5 Don't drink liquids after 7 pm. Besides, drinking too many liquids can cause you to awaken frequently to urinate.
- 6 Have a good sleeping environment that allows you to retire sufficiently warm, quiet, and in the dark.
- 7 Be comfortable; take a warm bath before retiring.
- 8 Use up all your worry moments in the morning. Solve conflicts early in the day and try a nap in the afternoon between two and five for about 30-minutes as a good energy booster.
- 9 Avoid boredom; stay engaged at every age, because boredom and isolation may lead to depression, which is a certain sleep corrupter.
- 10 Have a compatible bed partner, or snuggle up to a good book. Either way, snuggling helps sleep.

prohibited from sleeping, die. For us too insomnia can be a potentially fatal disorder that may warrant clinical intervention. But generally the 'medicalisation' of sleeplessness drives many healthy people to the medicine bottle, when most sleep problems can be solved with healthy lifestyle changes instead. There are other easy ways to sleep better.

## For sweet slumber

■ **Have a bath.** A hot bath really works if taken about an hour before going to bed. You might think that raising the temperature in a hot bath is what tricks the body into feeling sleepy, but it is the cooling down that occurs when you get out of the bath that facilitates sleep.

■ **Relax your muscles.** Gently tense and relax your muscles, shortly before going to bed. Beginning with the feet, close the eyes and try to tense all the muscles in one foot for a few seconds, and then completely release all the tension. Repeat this tensing, holding and relaxing for the rest of the body. Close your eyes and really enjoy the release of the muscles when you relax them. The whole exercise should last for about 10 – 15 minutes, and should leave you feeling a lot more relaxed, and ready to sleep. Also, keep your feet warm at night.

■ **Spare the pill.** Pills should be used as the last resort rather than the first. Pills bring the threat of chemical

dependency and also markedly increase the incidence of falls due to lack of coordination. Plus, pills never deliver the rest and refreshment we get from a natural sound sleep. Pills are dangerous, and the older we get, the more danger they present. Take a walk instead.

We all face life's occasional sleep interruptions, such as melancholy, twitchy legs, diminished sex drive, and worry. These may leave us feeling less rested the next day. However, these human conditions do not necessarily indicate that we have a sleep disorder, or that we should seek medical intervention, unless they interfere significantly with our daily lives. Sometimes all we need is an adjustment to our daily routine in order to enhance our ability to get a restful sleep.

*Stay Well*

