

Women & Sleep

The average woman needs eight hours of sleep each night but gets less than seven. A number of factors impact women's sleep. Changes in hormone levels, pregnancy, childcare, age, lifestyle, and illness may undermine the amount and quality of sleep a woman gets. Women with children who work outside of the home may give up sleep to make time for everything. Overall, a woman's sleep is lighter and more easily disturbed than that of a man. Although women tend to go to bed earlier and sleep more than men, they are less likely to feel refreshed, even after a full night's rest. In recent years, the medical community has focused more on women's sleep problems and how to resolve them.

SleepCaptions

Normal Sleep Habits for Women

Late Teens/Early Adults (18-25 years of age):

Teenagers require nine to ten hours of sleep per night, although many do not get it. Very young women may still require that additional hour or so of sleep into their early twenties. The timing of sleep may also be shifted to a later phase of the evening during this phase of life.

Adults (25-65 years of age):

Most adult women require seven to nine hours of sleep each night to feel completely rested. There are of course, variations.

Older Adults (18-25):

Older women need the same amount of sleep as they did throughout their adult years. However, the timing of sleep often shifts to an earlier phase of the evening.



Do I Have a Sleep Problem?

I have trouble falling asleep.

I have trouble staying asleep.

I frequently awaken throughout the night.

I do not feel rested.

I am chronically tired during the day.

I have a chronic physical or psychological illness.

I have been told that I snore.

SleepCaptions

Women's Sleep Issues

The following list, though not comprehensive, describes the most common sleep issues faced by women:

Career: a full time career can require much more than eight hours per day. Long hours may become routine. Commuting in traffic twice a day adds time to an already busy schedule. Some jobs such as teaching require additional work at home. Sleep becomes more difficult when job-related stress is coupled with the demands of family. Both men and women experience sleep issues related to their career. For both, good sleep habits may seem impossible to integrate into the work place.

Child Care: the first few weeks to months of life will undoubtedly become a period of sleep deprivation, especially if the new mother breast feeds. Infant demands are most intense when the baby must be fed and changed on every two to three hours. Insomnia related to postpartum "blues" or even postpartum depression may plague women as their bodies return to a non-pregnant state. Although the need for nighttime care lessens throughout the first year, childhood sleep disorders keep some mothers awake past the first year.

Menopause: major changes occur in the bodies of menopausal women, many of which disturb sleep. This process begins in the late thirties or forties, during the peri-menopausal phase. It is a time when the ovaries decrease production of estrogen and progesterone. A woman reaches menopause one year after her last menstrual period, usually around age fifty. Most sleep problems occur from late peri-menopause to post-menopause. Sleep-related symptoms include hot flashes, mood disorders, insomnia, and sleep-disordered breathing. Hot flashes, may be enough to awaken a woman from sleep several times per night. Hormone replacement therapy or alternative supplements may help.

Menstrual-Related Issues: for many women, the last week or two of the menstrual cycle (the luteal phase) tends to yield the most sleep-related problems. Premenstrual Syndrome or Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder is associated with

extreme sleep disturbances, especially during the luteal phase. Hormonal changes may precipitate insomnia or hypersomnia. Tiredness may also develop during ovulation. Cramps, bloating and headache during a menstrual period may be strong enough to prevent sleep. Treating underlying hormonal issues is integral to minimizing or resolving sleep problems for many women. This may involve hormone therapy (birth control pills) and dietary restrictions.

Pain and Sleep: any person experiencing nighttime pain is not likely to sleep well, whether their pain relates to injury or to disease. Some middle-aged women experience fibromyalgia, a condition characterized by widespread joint pain, as well as nighttime sleep disturbance and chronic fatigue. Fibromyalgia pain makes sleep more difficult, and the lack of sleep exacerbates symptoms. Older age brings about a host of potentially painful conditions. Arthritis pain can be severe enough to disrupt or prevent sleep. Managing pain through lifestyle modifications, good sleep habits and possibly medication will not only improve sleep but maximize good health.

Pregnancy: pregnancy-related sleep problems are common. How sleep is affected changes throughout the pregnancy. During the first trimester, an increased need to urinate at night disrupts sleep. Insomnia or frequent awakenings related to the emotional stress of a new pregnancy compounds sleep that is already compromised. Sleep deprivation then leads to daytime sleepiness. By the second trimester sleep may improve as the growing fetus moves away from the bladder but becomes worse as the fetus increases in size. By the third trimester the weight and position of the fetus may contribute to heartburn, leg cramps, back aches and increased urination. Many women cannot find a comfortable sleeping position at the end of their pregnancy. In the weeks before delivery, Braxton-Hicks contractions occur at any time of day or night.

Most Common Childhood Sleep Disorders

Bedwetting

Confusional Arousals

Sleep Terrors

Sleepwalking

Sleep Talking

Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome



SleepCaptions

Female Sleep Mechanics

Both men and women must reconcile a busy schedule with the need for sleep. Women's sleep is further impacted by their menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause.

Reproductive hormones are brain chemicals that regulate the function of the menstrual cycle. The hormones regulating the female reproductive system can interact with the type of neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) that stimulate wakefulness or promote sleep.



Risks for Women's Sleep Problems

- ✓ Menstrual irregularities
- ✓ Pregnancy
- ✓ Newborn with colic
- ✓ Child with a sleep disorder or chronic health condition
- ✓ The use of caffeine or alcohol
- ✓ Peri-menopause/menopause

Effects of Women's Sleep Problems

- ✓ Sleep deprivation
- ✓ Depression or anxiety
- ✓ Difficulty parenting or in the work place



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SleepIssues: "Women and Sleep"
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To schedule an appointment at any Sleep Medicine Centers location, visit

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(716)92-DREAM

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Did You Know?

The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) reports that 70% of women experience difficulty sleeping on at least some nights.

A 2007 NSF poll found that 42% of postpartum mothers rarely or never get a good night's sleep.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine reports that rheumatoid arthritis is associated with poor sleep in women.

A study in the Journal Sleep links pregnancy-related hormonal changes to the increased risk of Restless Legs Syndrome during pregnancy