



Menopause and Sleep Problems

Some women experience menopause-related sleep problems, especially if hormone changes cause hot flashes or sweats during the night. Lack of sleep and poor-quality sleep can make you tired, irritable, and moody. When you are tired, you may have difficulty concentrating, remembering things, working efficiently, and coping with daily stresses. You may be less patient with family and friends. Difficulty coping can lead to more stress, which can make sleep problems even worse. Adequate sleep is required for good health.

You have had enough sleep when you can function in an alert state during waking hours. Most adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night. During the menopause transition, you may find that you have more trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up feeling refreshed. These interventions may improve your sleep:

Lifestyle changes

- Maintain an environment that promotes sleep. Think quiet, cool, and dark. A white noise machine may be helpful. If you have night sweats, try a bedside fan, light pajamas and bedding, and placing an ice pack under your pillow—turning the pillow over during the night so that your face rests on the cool side.
- Try relaxation techniques such as meditation or slow deep-breathing exercises. You can learn these techniques through books, videos, and classes.
- Avoid TV, computer screens, smart phones, and electronic readers for at least an hour before bedtime, because the light from these devices may disrupt sleep.
- Follow the 15-minute rule. If you do not fall asleep within 15 minutes, get up, leave the bedroom, and do something relaxing in another room, such as reading a book or magazine or listening to quiet music. Return to bed when you are drowsy.
- Follow a regular sleep routine. Try to wake up and go to bed at about the same time each day, even on weekends.
- Use the bedroom only for sleep and sex.
- Avoid stimulants such as alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine throughout the entire day, not just during the evening. Although alcohol is initially a sedative, it often results in disrupted sleep. The stimulant effects of caffeine may last up to 20 hours. Coffee, tea, and cola are not the only culprits. Many pain relievers, diuretics, allergy and cold medications, and weight-control aids also contain caffeine.
- Avoid eating a large meal or sweets right before bedtime. This may disrupt sleep—and also promote weight gain.
- If your sleep is disrupted by your partner's late-night activities or snoring, discuss how this is affecting your sleep and consider solutions. Snoring may be a sign of sleep apnea, so your partner may benefit from seeing his or her healthcare provider.

- Exercise almost every day. Daily exercise improves sleep, but avoid strenuous exercise close to bedtime.
- If your sleep problems do not respond to lifestyle changes, consult your healthcare provider about other treatment options and to rule out specific causes of sleep problems such as thyroid abnormalities, depression, anxiety, allergies, restless leg syndrome, or sleep apnea (breathing problems during sleep). Women with serious sleep disturbances may benefit from consultation with a sleep specialist.

Treatments

- Herbs and supplements: Melatonin, valerian, chamomile, lavender, lemon balm, and passion flower may be mild sedatives, although scientific data are limited. Government oversight of herbs and supplements is limited, so purchase products made in the United States under good manufacturing practices.
- Over-the-counter sleep aids: Many contain diphenhydramine (eg, Benadryl) and may help you fall asleep and stay asleep. Try low doses (25 mg or less) to reduce the risk of morning grogginess.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT): CBT is a specific form of psychotherapy that effectively treats many sleep problems.
- Prescription sleep medications: Medications approved to treat sleep problems may be helpful to break a cycle of insomnia but ideally should be used only as a short-term solution. Some result in morning fatigue, they can become less effective over time, and they can be habit forming. The grogginess associated with sleep medications can increase the risk of falls, so try to avoid sleep medications if you are at increased risk of falling.
- Treatments for night sweats: If you have bothersome hot flashes and/or night sweats that disrupt sleep, consider treating your nighttime symptoms to improve your sleep. Effective treatments for night sweats include hormone therapy and nonhormonal medications such as certain low-dose antidepressants. Hormone therapy has other benefits and risks, so you should speak with your healthcare provider to see whether hormones or other medications that treat night sweats are right for you.
- With any medication you choose for sleep, always use the lowest dose that treats your sleep problems for the shortest time needed.

For more information about sleep problems, review *Your Guide to Healthy Sleep* (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/sleep/healthy_sleep.pdf) from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, as well as the National Sleep Foundation website, www.sleepfoundation.org.



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