

Healthy aging: Sleep

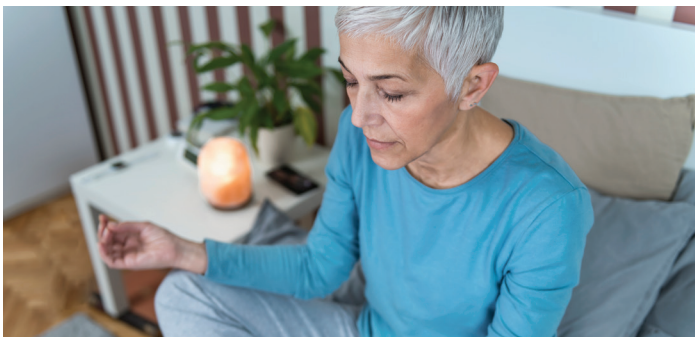
Changes to sleep patterns are a normal part of aging. Older adults have a slightly different sleep-wake cycle. Though there are changes in sleep patterns, the amount of sleep an older adult needs stay about the same, which is seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Sleep is an important part of overall health and wellness for healthy aging.



How does sleep change as we age?

Changes to your “biological clock” take place as you age. Signals from the biological clock in older adults happen earlier which is why older adults tend to have earlier bed and wake-up times. Even if you do not have any sleep disorders, you will likely experience some changes. This is normal. Some changes you may experience are:

- earlier bedtimes and earlier waketimes
- napping during the day
- less sleep during the night
- lighter sleep compared to deep sleep, causing more nighttime awakenings



The 12 healthy aging sleep tips

There are many things you do during the day that can affect the quality and quantity of your sleep. Following these 12 tips will help you get to sleep and stay asleep as you age:

- 1. Keep a regular sleep schedule and routine.** Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. A change in your schedule (like if you sleep in or stay up late) can disrupt your body’s natural “clock”.
- 2. Create a relaxing, stress-free routine before bed.** Routines can start 30 minutes to 1 hour before bedtime and might include taking a warm bath, reading, listening to calming music, or meditation.
- 3. Create a sleep friendly bedroom.** A bedroom that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool can help promote restful sleep. Keep “sleep stealers” such as television, computers, and cellphones out of the bedroom. Reserve your bedroom for sleep only.
- 4. Be active throughout the day.** Being active during the day can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep. For some, participating in vigorous physical activity too close to bedtime makes it hard to fall asleep. Find what works best for you!



- 5. Make sure you get natural light.** This is especially important first thing in the morning to help keep a regular sleep-wake cycle. During dark months, bright artificial lights can help.
- 6. Avoid stimulants too close to bedtime.** Caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes can all negatively affect your sleep.
- 7. Avoid screen time at least 1 hour before bedtime.** Avoiding screen time helps your body to wind down before sleeping. The blue light from electronic screens (cellphones, tablets, computers, TVs) tricks the brain into thinking it is daytime making it hard to fall asleep.
- 8. Do not go to bed too hungry or too full.** Heavy meals should be avoided at least two hours before bedtime. Being too hungry before bed can also make it hard to fall asleep. Eating a small nutritious snack, such as an apple and cheese or a bowl of whole grain cereal with milk, can help stave off hunger until breakfast.
- 9. Keep a sleep diary.** A sleep diary is a great way to track your sleep. Once you have finished a few entries, look for patterns or practices that might be helping or disturbing your sleep. Making small changes in your habits can set you on the path to better sleep!



- 10. Discuss any sleep difficulties with your health care provider.** Sleep difficulties might include night sweats, hot flashes, frequent urination, restless legs, pain, or any pauses in breathing.
- 11. Discuss your medication with your health care provider.** Some medications might interfere with your sleep.
- 12. Remember sleep changes are normal as we age.** However, if these changes are having a negative affect on your life, discuss with your health care provider.



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