

Women and Sleep



University Services

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When it comes to sleep, women are different than men. According to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), women are more likely than men to have difficulty falling and staying asleep and to experience more daytime sleepiness on a weekly basis. Research has shown that too little sleep results in problems concentrating, poor performance on the job and in school, and possibly, increased sickness and weight gain.

Although most people need 7-9 hours of sleep each night to function the next day, the NSF 1998 *Women and Sleep* Poll found that the average women aged 30-60 sleeps only 6.41 hours during the work week.

MEN vs. WOMEN IN SLEEP

	Men	Women
Trouble Falling Asleep	17%	26%
Awake more often during the night	28%	35%
Wake up too early	19%	24%
Nighttime pain	48%	58%
Less sleep than they need to function	19%	24%

Tips That May Help You Sleep

- **Exercise regularly**, but complete your workout at least 3 hours before bedtime. Exercise may also relieve some PMS symptoms and increase the amount of deep sleep.
- **Avoid food and drinks high in sugar, caffeine, and alcohol** close to bed time. Caffeine and alcohol disrupt sleep. Caffeine can also contribute to premenstrual bloating.
- **Nicotine should be avoided entirely**; it may make it difficult to fall asleep and lead to fragmented sleep
- **Avoid heavy meals** before bed.
- Try to have a **standard relaxing bedtime routine** and keep **regular sleep times**.
- Make sure your bedroom **is dark, cool, and quiet**.
- Use your bed for **sleep and sex only**.
- **Take a hot bath** or soak in a hot tub before bedtime.

Talk About Your Sleep With Your Health Care Professional

Women's Unique Sleep Experience

Getting the right amount of sleep is vital, but just as important is the quality of your sleep. Biological conditions unique to women, like the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and menopause, can affect the quality of sleep. This is because the changing levels of hormones that a woman experiences throughout the month and over her lifetime have an impact on sleep. Understanding the effects of these hormones and addressing environmental factors and lifestyle habits can help women enjoy a good night's sleep.

Menstruation

Changes in women's bodies occur at different times in the menstrual cycle and may affect sleep. For example, according to NSF's *Women & Sleep* Poll 50% of menstruating women report that bloating disturbs their sleep. On average, these women report disrupted sleep for two to three days each menstrual cycle. These changes can be linked to the rise and fall of hormone levels in the body. In general, estrogen increases Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep, a deep stage of sleep when we typically dream. The hormone progesterone, which rises after ovulation, may cause some women to feel more sleepy or fatigued. However, poor quality sleep is more likely at the beginning of the menstrual cycle when bleeding starts. Other factors that influence sleep are stress, mood, illness, medications, diet, lifestyle and the sleep environment.

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) symptoms may start about days 22-28 in a women's cycle. These include bloating, headaches, moodiness, irritability and abdominal cramps: any or all may contribute to difficulty sleeping well. The most common sleep-related problems reported by women with PMS are: insomnia (difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up too early or unrefreshed sleep), hypersomnia (sleeping too much), and daytime sleepiness.

Many sleep problems can be resolved by changing sleep habits, reducing stress, improving diet and following an exercise routine. If you are experiencing sleep problems or excessive daytime sleepiness, you should speak with your doctor immediately. Your doctor can help determine the cause of your sleep problem or may refer you to a sleep disorders center for further evaluation. These centers are staffed with sleep specialists who can help diagnose sleep problems.

Pregnancy

As if nausea, back pain, fetal movement and constantly running to the ladies' room aren't enough, some women develop restless legs syndrome (RLS), snoring, wild dreams and insomnia. In the NSF 1998 *Women and Sleep* poll, 78% of women reported more disturbed sleep during pregnancy than at other times.

Pregnancy Survival Tips

- Plan, schedule and prioritize sleep!
- Sleep while you can.
- Drink lots of fluids during the day, especially water, but cut down on the amount you drink before bedtime.
- To avoid nausea try to eat bland snacks throughout the day — like crackers.
- Sleep on your left side to improve the flow of blood and nutrients to your fetus.
- Put a nightlight in the bathroom instead of turning on the light to use the bathroom — this will be less arousing and help you return to sleep more quickly.

Menopause

Although menopausal symptoms vary from woman to woman, menopause is a time of major hormonal, physical and psychological change. From the transition into menopause to one year after a woman's period has stopped, women report significant sleep problems. Most notably, these sleep problems are related to hot flashes, changing moods, insomnia and breathing problems during sleep. Sleep problems also can be accompanied by depression and anxiety.

Sleep Tips During Menopause

- Eat healthy
- Dress in lightweight clothing
- Reduce Stress and worry as much as possible



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