Sleep & Aging

What’s Normal?

Aging itself doesn’t seem to account for sleep complaints in older adults. If you’re not happy with your sleep, talk with your doctor about possible causes and healthy ways to improve it, says Johns Hopkins sleep researcher Adam Spira, Ph.D.

Natural Sleep Changes

Falling asleep and waking up earlier

More time in lighter sleep

More awakenings—3-4x/night

Why

Changes in part of brain that controls sleep + naturally lower levels of growth hormone and melatonin

Is Your Sleep Healthy?

1:3

Has trouble falling asleep

1:4

Has obstructive sleep apnea

1:8

Has restless legs syndrome

1:3

Has trouble falling asleep

1:4

Has obstructive sleep apnea

1:8

Has restless legs syndrome

7-9

Hours of sleep: what a healthy, older adult needs

The Sleep Difference

Poor sleep is linked to higher risk for falls, depression and dementia + more difficulty managing conditions like chronic pain, diabetes and heart disease

Know the Sleep Stealers

Long or late naps

Nighttime bathroom trips

Eighty percent of adults age 80 and older are awakened by the need for night-time bathroom trips. Underlying causes may include diabetes, enlarged prostate, infections and kidney disease.

Caffeine in the afternoon or evening

Lack of exercise

“Screen time” close to bedtime

Medications

Alpha-blockers and beta-blockers (for high blood pressure and heart disease), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (for depression), steroids, cold medicines, diuretics, nicotine gum and patches, and more can interfere with sound sleep.