



# SLEEP AND GETTING OLDER –

## Frequently asked questions about changes

### **Do older adults need as much sleep as younger people?**

Sleep needs change over a person's lifetime. Children and adolescents need more sleep than adults. Interestingly, older adults need about the same amount of sleep as younger adults -- seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

### **What are the consequences of poor sleep for older adults?**

Older adults who have poor nighttime sleep are more likely to have attention and memory problems, a depressed mood, excessive daytime sleepiness, more nighttime falls, and use more over-the-counter or prescription sleep aids. Poor sleep is also associated with a poorer quality of life.

### **What is the most common reason older adult wake up at night?**

The most common reason older adults wake up at night is to go to the bathroom. Prostate enlargement in men and continence problems in women are often the cause. Unfortunately, waking up to go to the bathroom at night also places older adults at greater risk for falling.

### **As I get older, why do I tend to become tired earlier in the evening?**

As people age, their sleeping and waking patterns tend to change. Older adults usually become sleepier earlier in the evening and wake up earlier in the morning. If they don't adjust their bedtimes to these changes, they may have difficulty falling and staying asleep.

### **I have trouble falling asleep at night. Is that just a normal part of aging?**

Many people believe that poor sleep is a normal part of aging, but it is not. In fact, many healthy older adults report few or no sleep problems. Sleep patterns change as we age, but disturbed sleep and waking up tired every day are not part of normal aging.

### **What are some suggestions for getting a good night's sleep?**

- Follow a regular schedule -- go to sleep and wake up at the same time, even on weekends.
- Try not to nap during the day -- you might be less sleepy at night.
- Try to exercise at regular times each day, but not too close to bedtime.
- Try to get some natural light in the afternoon each day.
- Don't drink beverages with caffeine late in the day. Caffeine is a stimulant and can keep you awake.
- Don't drink alcohol to help you sleep. Even small amounts of alcohol can make it harder to stay asleep.
- Don't smoke to help you sleep. Smoking is dangerous for many reasons, including the hazard of falling asleep with a lit cigarette. Also, the nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant.
- Create a safe and comfortable place to sleep. The room should be dark, well ventilated, and as quiet as possible.
- Develop a bedtime routine. Do the same things each night to tell your body that it's time to wind down. Some people watch the evening news, read a book, or soak in a warm bath.
- After turning off the light, give yourself about 15 minutes to fall asleep. If you are still awake and not drowsy, get out of bed. When you get sleepy, go back to bed.

*Information provided by: NIH <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/sleepandaging/faq/faq11.html>*

**[www.commonhealth.virginia.gov](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov)**