

Hormonal shifts & sleep disruption in women

Many young women sacrifice nightly sleep so they can accomplish their responsibilities at work, keep up with their role as a mother and still have time for their spouse and friends. They disregard sleepiness and strive to be the perfect “everything” for everyone. Employed women under the age of 40 report excessive daytime sleepiness and studies show this generation experiences insomnia, depression, anxiety, sleep apnea or changing hormonal levels during their menstrual cycle. Insomnia is the most common sleep problem among women.

The Facts...

- Melatonin (the natural chemical that regulates our internal clocks to help us fall asleep at night) is starting to decline with your menstrual cycle. Changes in hormone levels during the menstrual cycle can disturb sleep and cause daytime sleepiness. Hormonal effects can be direct, by changing sleep patterns; or indirect, by affecting mood and emotional state.
- The relationship between hormones and the sleep-wake cycle in women is influenced by the menstrual cycle. Prior to the menstrual cycle, hormonal changes, including the sudden drop in levels of progesterone, affect the body's temperature control, which in turn can reduce the amount of deep sleep.
- Difficulty falling asleep is more common in women under the age of 35. It is often linked to anxiety disorders and a stressful lifestyle brought on by the demands of their employer, financial commitments or family responsibilities.

Women between the ages of 40-55 also report excessive daytime sleepiness, depression, anxiety,

insomnia and sleep apnea; but not for the same reasons as the women under 40. During this stage of life, women tend to experience empty nest syndrome, become caregivers for parents, are still hardworking employees and begin experiencing perimenopause symptoms, including hot flashes.

The Reason...

- Perimenopause is the first big biological shift and it begins 8-10 years before menopause. The ovaries start reducing the production of estrogen and progesterone. Both of these hormones help to promote sleep. The decline of hormones can be a disturbing process, sometimes contributing to the inability to fall asleep.
- Decreasing estrogen levels during this phase may cause hot flashes that disturb sleep. Approximately two thirds of perimenopause women have sleep problems from reduced estrogen levels, linked to snoring and sleep disordered breathing.

As women age, sleep becomes lighter and deep sleep is not easily achieved due to physical and hormonal changes. Women habitually wake up at night and feel tired during the day. Since hormones have been disturbing their sleep most of their life, it's considered normal. However, once menopause occurs it becomes apparent that it is not normal.

What is happening?

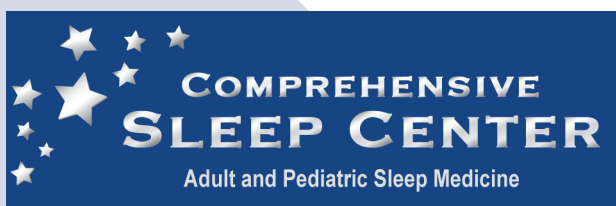
- Menopause is the point when a woman no longer has menstrual periods for 12 consecutive months. At this stage, the ovaries have stopped releasing eggs and producing most of their estrogen.

- Hot flashes are the number one culprit for sleep disruption during menopause caused by the spiking and falling of estrogen and progesterone levels that awaken the brain during sleep.
- Maintaining sleep becomes difficult and is one of the early signs of menopause.
- Once menopause enters post menopause, sleep problems continue. Imbalances in your hormones affect the quality of your sleep.
- 10 percent of women experience hypothyroidism (inadequate production of thyroid hormone), after menopause.
- The decrease in thyroid hormone can lead to weight gain, which increases your risk for snoring and sleep apnea.
- Hypothyroidism can cause your airway to narrow, further increasing your chance of developing sleep apnea.

What can I do?

- Eat well and exercise
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeinated drinks and high calorie foods
- Get enough sleep (at least 7-8 hours per night)
- Sleep in lightweight pajamas and sheets that wick moisture away from your skin and dry quickly
- Talk with your doctor or gynecologist

If you experience any sleep problems such as symptoms of insomnia, restless legs, sleep apnea, including frequent awakenings, snoring that is often accompanied by gasping, choking or daytime sleepiness, schedule an appointment with Dr. Oktai Mamedov. He is board certified in Sleep Medicine and Internal Medicine. Call (517) 755-6888 to schedule your consultation today.



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