

FACT SHEET: WOMEN AND SLEEP

KEY FACTS

- Women generally have greater subjective complaints of insufficient sleep or non-restorative sleep than men.
- Women generally have an increased need for more sleep than men.
- Women generally sacrifice sleep for family and work commitments more often than men.



Q: DO WOMEN HAVE OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA?

A: OSA is less common in pre-menopausal women and the risk increases during menopause. The overall prevalence of OSA in women is estimated at 9% of the adult female population.

Q: WHAT FACTORS RELATED TO WOMEN'S SLEEP IMPACT WOMEN EXCLUSIVELY?

A: Sleep quality can deteriorate prior to and during menstruation. Women complain of insomnia and consequently excessive daytime sleepiness due to cramping, anxiety, breast tenderness, headaches and mood changes.

Q: HOW DOES MENSTRUAL OR FEMALE-RELATED PAIN IMPACT SLEEP?

A: Abdominal cramping related to menstrual cycles and pain due to endometriosis can lead to discomfort during sleep, frequent arousals or awakenings, and poor sleep quality.

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Q: WHAT ABOUT POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME?

A: This disorder has an increased risk of obstructive sleep apnea due to the increased production of testosterone which is one of the symptoms of the disorder.

Q: DOES PREGNANCY HAVE SLEEP-RELATED ISSUES?

A: Pregnancy is definitely associated with sleep changes. During the first trimester, sleep quality is poor; improving during the second trimester, and then, poor once again during the third trimester. The sleep disturbances are due to body discomfort, heartburn, nausea, nocturia, leg cramps and restless legs. In addition, the risk of snoring and obstructive sleep apnea increase during pregnancy. Pre-eclampsia, a condition placing the mother and baby at significant risk, is directly associated with a higher prevalence of snoring and obstructive sleep apnea.

Q: DOES SLEEP IMPROVE AFTER PREGNANCY?

A: The symptoms related to pregnancy-induced sleep issues typically do resolve after giving birth; however, the new mother will have sleep disturbances related to the newborn's sleep schedule and other family duties. The new mother may also have discomfort related to surgical pain if a C-section or episiotomy was necessary.

Q: HOW DOES SLEEP CHANGE AS A WOMAN AGES?

A: The post-menopausal female has declining female-related hormonal levels resulting in hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, and fatigue. All of these contribute significantly to disturbed sleep, bouts of wakefulness during the sleep cycle, and resulting excessive daytime sleepiness. In addition, the post-menopausal woman may have other health issues requiring medications many of which have a negative impact on sleep quality.

Q: HOW DOES FIBROMYALGIA IMPACT SLEEP?

A: Fibromyalgia results in painful tenderness throughout the body. Individuals with fibromyalgia complain of non-restorative sleep. If a sleep study is performed, the brain waves of someone with fibromyalgia may demonstrate awake brain activity even during deeper sleep stages.

FURTHER READING

1. National Sleep Foundation – www.sleepfoundation.org
2. American Academy of Sleep Medicine – www.yoursleep.aasmnet.org
3. www.emedicinehealth.com
4. www.womenworld.org