

CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020

CAREGIVING & SLEEP DEPRIVATION Part 2

Effects of Sleep Deprivation on Caregivers

In our February Caregiver Newsletter, we explored why caregivers of persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease [AD] and/or other dementias are at risk for sleep deprivation and highlighted caregiver specific causes. Factors such as stage of AD, progression, sun-downing, obstructive sleep apnea, caregiver exhaustion and caregiver insomnia were discussed. In this issue we will explore some effects of sleep deprivation on caregivers.

In 2015, the National Sleep Foundation drew experts together from multiple disciplines including sleep, anatomy and physiology, geriatrics, pediatrics, neurology, and women's health to accomplish a consensus from the broadest range of scientific disciplines. The results, listed on sleepfoundation.org, were sleep recommendations for adults ages 26-64 of 7-9 hours per day and for older adults ages 65+ of 7-8 hours and a "may be appropriate range" for some individuals who need only 5-6 hours or up to 10 hours of sleep. What is important is that sleep is restorative-it allows your brain to rest, replenish and reboot, if you will. There are several stages of sleep, and during the restorative sleep stages, our brains are in a neurological state where delta waves restore our physical body (think healing, immunity building, and tissue repair) and REM sleep stimulates cognition (think memory and information allocation and retention) and, along with dreaming, REM sleep helps to process experiences and emotions.

On a **physical** level, sleep deprivation can contribute or lead to:

- increased vulnerability to illness and infections
- high blood pressure and other cardiac problems
- decreased libido
- increased pain sensitivity, more aches, sprains, and pains, longer healing time for muscle and joint pain
- interference with insulin production and blood sugar metabolism which could lead to or worsen diabetes
- balance and gait problems which may lead to injury and/or falls
- decreased leptin production-a hormone that helps control appetite, and increased ghrelin production-a hormone that craves sugary and fatty foods and leads to weight gain
- other chronic illnesses

On a **cognitive level**, sleep deprivation can contribute or lead to:

- short term memory loss
- decreased focus, difficulty remaining on and finishing tasks, difficulty with managing tasks/prioritizing
- lowered reaction times and higher distractibility [both dangerous when driving]
- word finding difficulty, accessing memories
- difficulties with problem solving, managing daily tasks, and managing finances

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“Optimist: Someone who figures that taking a step backward after taking a step forward is not a disaster, it's a cha-cha.”

— Robert Brault



In This Issue

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- Some Helpful Suggestions
- Tips for your loved one

On an **emotional** level, sleep deprivation can contribute or lead to:

- mood swings and difficulty managing emotions
- low frustration tolerance, irritability, angry outbursts
- sadness, tearfulness, apathy, lack of motivation, depression, feelings of hopelessness
- worry, anxiety, panic attacks
- dependence on or addiction to drugs, alcohol or other detrimental substances or behaviors to cope with fatigue, stress, and/or difficult feelings.
- continuing on the hamster wheel of stress and caregiver burnout without reprieve

Some Helpful Suggestions for you:

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute have the following recommendations in their *Healthy Sleep At A Glance Handout*:

- Stick to a sleep schedule—Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.
- Don't exercise too late in the day.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed.
- Avoid large meals and beverages late at night.
- Don't take a nap after 3 p.m.
- Relax before bed—for example, take a hot bath.
- Create a good sleeping environment. Get rid of distractions such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or a TV or computer in the bedroom.
- See a doctor if you have continued trouble sleeping.



The Mayo Clinic states in their online article *Sleep: The foundation for healthy habits* that “when your body and mind are well-rested, you'll be able to respond to life with greater perspective and understanding.” Sleep is also an important tool in stress management and achieving other wellness goals. They recommend “ease into sleep [by] setting aside a little time before bed for relaxation [which] can help you transition into sleep. Try deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, gentle stretching or guided imagery to help focus your attention away from worries and into the present. If your busy mind keeps you awake, jot down your thoughts in a journal or on a pad of paper by your bed.”

Other helpful modifications include shutting off electronics [TVs, computers] 30+ minutes before bedtime, turning smartphones and tablet screens to bedtime mode and putting them out of easy reach from in-bed scrolling, and doing other relaxing activities instead like reading, writing a gratitude list, or drinking chamomile tea. Lavender and other relaxing aromatherapy oils, linen and pillow sprays can help as well as soothing sound machines. All of These suggestions can not only benefit you but your loved one as well.

Some Helpful Suggestions for your loved one:

The Mayo Clinic states in their article *Alzheimer's: Managing Sleep Problems* to promote better sleep:

- **Treat underlying conditions.** Sometimes conditions such as depression, sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome cause sleep problems.
- **Establish a routine.** Maintain regular times for eating, waking up and going to bed.
- **Avoid stimulants.** Alcohol, caffeine and nicotine can interfere with sleep. Limit use of these substances, especially at night. Also, avoid TV during periods of wakefulness at night.
- **Encourage physical activity.** Walks and other physical activities can help promote better sleep at night.
- **Limit daytime sleep.** Discourage afternoon napping.
- **Set a peaceful mood in the evening.** Help the person relax by reading out loud or playing soothing music. A comfortable bedroom temperature can help the person with dementia sleep well.
- **Manage medications.** Some medications can lead to insomnia. Talk to the doctor. Administering the medication at a different time can help.
- **Consider melatonin.** Melatonin might help improve sleep and reduce sundowning in people with dementia.
- **Provide proper light.** Bright light therapy in the evening can lessen sleep-wake cycle disturbances in people with dementia. Adequate lighting at night also can reduce agitation that can happen when surroundings are dark. Regular daylight exposure might address day and night reversal problems.

Sources and for more information: The National Sleep Foundation at www.sleepfoundation.org; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute *Healthy Sleep At A Glance Handout*: https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/sleep/healthy_sleep_atglance.pdf & The Mayo Clinic www.mayoclinic.org