SLEEP AND MENOPAUSE

Studies show that lack of sleep leads to decreased function in the daytime, including lack of concentration, irritability, and a weaker immune system. For women undergoing menopause, this can be even more devastating as they deal with shifting hormone levels, as well as all the stresses of adult life.

Hot Flashes and Night Sweats

A major cause of menopause-related sleeplessness is hot flashes. Fluctuating levels of estrogen and progesterone that occur during perimenopause and menopause cause hot flashes in about 85 percent of American women. Hot flashes can cause a menopausal woman to briefly rouse 100 times a night—around three times more than normal.

Many times, hot flashes are accompanied by drenching night sweats, which disrupt sleep further. Waking up soaking wet will often lead to a change in night clothes or bed linens. This amount of activity makes it difficult to get back to sleep once you are up.

Hormone replacement therapy remains the gold standard in treating moderate to severe hot flashes and other menopause symptoms and low-dose antidepressants may be also effective. For perimenopausal women, low-dose combination birth control pills may control hot flashes and even out irregular periods.

In addition to medication, the following tips might keep you cooler at night and help you sleep better without the use of hormones:

- Wear loose clothing to bed. Clothing made of natural fibers, like cotton, is usually best.
- Keep your bedroom cool and well-ventilated.
- Avoid certain foods that may cause sweating (such as spicy foods), especially right before bed.
- Avoid caffeine. In addition to being a stimulant that will keep you awake, caffeine has also been proven to trigger hot-flashes

MENOPAUSE AND INSOMNIA

Sleep difficulty is one of the hallmarks of menopause; in fact, according to the National Sleep Foundation, 61 percent of perimenopausal to postmenopausal women report frequent bouts of insomnia. For many women, these unwelcome changes are initiated or otherwise affected by imbalances in various hormones that are regulated by the body’s biological clock.

Like other kinds of insomnia, the sleeplessness of perimenopause and menopause can be lessened by sticking to the cycles of sleeping and waking that you have previously established with your biological clock. This helps your body override some of the conflicting messages it may be getting from wayward hormones.

Some other tips that can help you get a better nights rest include:

- Sleep only in the bedroom
- Avoid alcohol and smoking
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Get aerobic exercise at least 4 times per week

For menopausal women, the most commonly reported sleep disorders are insomnia, sleep apnea, snoring, and restless leg syndrome. If you suspect that you may have one of this disorders, talk to your doctor about scheduling a sleep study.