

As we age we often experience normal changes in our sleeping patterns; we may become sleepy earlier, wake up earlier, or enjoy less deep sleep. Sleep may be less consolidated and more prone to being influenced by poor sleep environment or bad habits. But sufficient sleep is just as important to our physical and emotional health over the age of 50 as it was when we were younger.



Common causes of insomnia and sleep problems in older adults include:

- **Lack of exercise.** Our bodies are designed to be active if you are too sedentary, you may not feel sleepy or feel sleepy all of the time. Regular exercise during the day and at least three hours before bedtime, can promote good sleep. The Chief Medical Officers advice is 30-minutes a day at moderate intensity on 5 days of the week.
- **Poor sleep habits and sleep environment.** Examples of poor sleep habits are; irregular sleep hours, consumption of caffeine/alcohol before bedtime and falling asleep with the TV on.
- **Pain or medical illness.** Pain and many health conditions such as a frequent need to urinate, arthritis, asthma, diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis, night-time heartburn, menopause, and Alzheimer's will interfere with sleep.
- **Medications.** The number of medications and their side effects will impair sleep or even stimulate wakefulness.
- **Psychological stress or psychological disorders.** Anxiety, anger or significant life changes will cause stress and sleeplessness.
- **Sleep disorders.** Restless Legs Syndrome and sleep-disordered breathing; such as snoring and sleep apnoea, occur more frequently in older adults.
- **Learned response.** People with a legitimate cause for having trouble sleeping (E.g. after suffering a loss) may lie in bed and try to force themselves to sleep. Eventually their bodies learn not to sleep. Even after the original reason for sleep disruption has passed, the learned response of not sleeping can remain.

It is important to establish a good bedtime routine to aid a good nights sleep. If you are concerned about sleep problems that continue for few weeks you should discuss this with your GP.

There are many things you can do naturally to improve sleep; foremost is to exercise and learn breathing techniques. Tai Chi for Health (Essex) can provide opportunities to learn Yoga and Tai Chi for all ages and abilities. They can set up groups or 1-2-1 personal tuition. Call 01375 408912 or e-mail tc4hessex@gmail.com for advice or information.

Age Concern Thurrock wishes to thank Trevor Rawson for this article.

If you are interested in registering for taster sessions of Tai Chi or Yoga please call ACT on 01375 389872