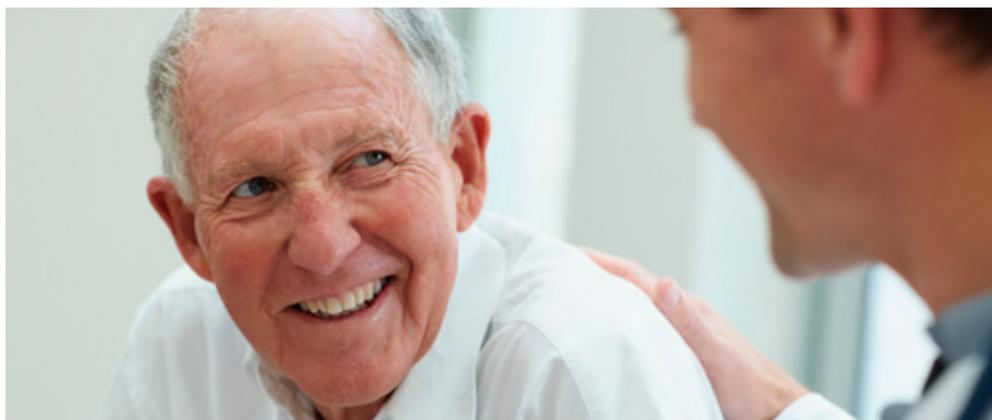


## FACT SHEET: SLEEP AND AGING

### KEY FACTS

- Sleep disorders are more prevalent as people become older.
- Any changes in sleep quality, or new symptoms of unhealthy sleep, should always be discussed with a physician.
- Sleep can significantly impact your everyday life as well as affect any existing health problems.



#### Q: IN WHAT WAY DOES A PERSON'S SLEEP SCHEDULE CHANGE AS THEY BECOME OLDER?

**A:** As people become older, it is common to experience an “advanced sleep phase,” which causes difficulty falling asleep and an increase in difficulty tolerating changes in the sleep schedule. This means that someone can expect to fall asleep earlier, awaken earlier, and experience greater difficulty adapting to jet lag.

#### Q: DOES THE PREVALENCE OF OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA (OSA) INCREASE WITH AGE?

**A:** Yes, the prevalence is estimated to be around 1 to 5 percent in young adults, but is closer to 39 percent in elderly people with sleep complaints.

#### Q: DOES MENOPAUSE HAVE AN EFFECT ON SLEEP AND AGING WOMEN?

**A:** The most common sleep complaints made by women in the years surrounding menopause are trouble falling asleep, waking frequently during the night, and feeling unusually tired during the day. The prevalence of OSA is estimated to increase in women post-menopause.

#### Q: IS IT NORMAL FOR SLEEP QUALITY TO DIMINISH WITH AGE?

**A:** As people get older, an increase in complaints of insomnia or difficulty breathing at night is common. Sleep deprivation and sleep related breathing disorders can have a big impact on your overall health. If you experience reduced sleep quality, you should always report this to your physician.



**SLEEP DISORDERS  
CENTERS**

[TampaBaySleep.org](http://TampaBaySleep.org)

## FACT SHEET: SLEEP AND AGING

### **Q: DO OLDER PEOPLE NORMALLY HAVE AN URGE TO MOVE THEIR LEGS OR AN ODD SENSATION IN THEIR LEGS AS THEY'RE TRYING TO FALL ASLEEP AND IS LEG-KICKING NORMAL DURING THE NIGHT?**

**A:** This is very common in most adults (up to 24%), but the prevalence of these symptoms increases with age. When people kick their legs during sleep, it may be related to Periodic Limb Movement Disorder (PLMD). Urges to move the legs while awake is most likely Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS). Both of these disorders can be benign, but can also be related to a more serious condition like iron deficiency. It is always important to discuss these symptoms with your physician.

### **Q: HOW DOES AGING AFFECT THINGS LIKE SLEEP WALKING, SLEEP TALKING, OR OTHER ABNORMAL NOCTURNAL BEHAVIORS?**

**A:** In children, it is much more common to see isolated events like sleep walking, sleep terrors, or abnormal behavior but they will generally outgrow these problems. On the other hand, if these behaviors persist into adulthood, they may be an indication of a more serious problem, such as OSA, REM sleep behavior disorder or even a psychological problem related to events like post-traumatic stress disorder.

### **Q: CAN SLEEP HAVE AN EFFECT ON MY OTHER HEALTH ISSUES?**

**A:** Yes. Healthy sleep is critical to a healthy lifestyle. Sleep disorders can have a significant negative impact on overall health – especially cardiovascular, respiratory, neurological, and mental health.

## FURTHER READING

1. “The Promise of Sleep” – William C. Dement, M.D., Ph.D.
2. “Principles and Practice of Sleep Medicine, 2nd Edition” – Kryger, Roth, Dement
3. “Encyclopedia of Sleep and Dreaming” – Mary Carskadon, Ph.D