

Women's Sleep Issues

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More Than Hot Flashes

If asked to picture what a person with Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) looks like, many of us come up with the image of a portly, middle-aged man. While it's true that many of those affected by OSA are male and many of those males are overweight (although about 1/3 of Dr Whitney's OSA patients are considered fit), a growing number are also female.

Prior to menopause, sleep apnea affects men almost twice as much as women, but after onset of menopause, women are nearly as likely to have OSA. While the reason for this is not completely clear, many point to lower levels of estrogen and progesterone caused by menopause.

Common concerns when addressing sleep issues for women include:

- Hormonal fluctuations that occur during menstruation, pregnancy and menopause
- Pain syndromes including fibromyalgia, arthritis and headaches
- Psychological issues including depression

Sleep disorders that are more likely to affect women include Insomnia, Restless Leg Syndrome, and Periodic Limb Movement Disorder.

A Message From Dr. Whitney

By Dr Courtney Whitney, Board Certified Sleep Physician, Owner, Medical Director WSDC
There are some interesting differences between men and women as it pertains to sleep. Those related to pregnancy and menopause are of the greatest interest. Pregnant women have an increase in the frequency of Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS), nocturnal acid reflux, snoring and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA).

Restless leg syndrome may present due to iron deficiency and could improve with iron and folate supplementation. Some patients have improvement in RLS with adequate total sleep time (8-9 hours) and a restriction on caffeine intake. The prescription medications used for RLS, such as Mirapex and Requip, should be avoided during pregnancy.

The acid reflux during pregnancy is due to an increase in abdominal pressure and esophageal changes. Acid reflux can disturb sleep by causing an increase in the number of awakenings and arousals. Avoiding food 3 hours before bedtime and elevating the head of the bed can often improve reflux symptoms.

During pregnancy there can be an increase in nasal congestion and pharyngeal edema (swelling). This increases the frequency of snoring and may also cause obstructive sleep apnea. In the presence of OSA we see an increase in pregnancy-associated high blood pressure, protein in the urine, and possibly insulin resistance/gestational diabetes.

Prior to menopause there are typically 3 men to every one woman with OSA. After menopause the women catch up and the ratio is close to 1:1. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but appear to be independent of weight gain. If you are not sleeping well it affects you on many levels. Not only are you impaired in your daily activity but you may be at risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and motor vehicle accidents. If you are having trouble sleeping or are concerned about a sleep disorder talk to your doctor, or contact us for information and help.

Do you Think You Might Have A Sleep Disorder?

Yes No

- Do you snore?
- Are you excessively tired during the day?
- Have you been told you stop breathing during sleep?
- Do you have a history of hypertension?
- Is your neck size > 17 inches (male) or > 16 inches (female)?
- Do you wake up to use the bathroom more than twice a night?
- Have you ever fallen asleep while driving?

Answering "yes" to two (or more) of these questions may be a positive screen for Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Patient should consider talking with their healthcare provider about a referral for a sleep evaluation or sleep study at your local hospital.

We Can Help!

Discover real solutions to your sleep problems by talking with your Health Care Provider about a sleep study at

How Much Sleep Do You Need?

SPOILER ALERT—there is no magic number. The amount of sleep one needs will vary based on their age, health and lifestyle factors. Infants, for instance, should get 14-15 hours. Preschoolers need 11-13 hours. The recommended amount of sleep for a teenager is 8.5 to 9.5 hours, and adults should get 7-9 hours a night. It is difficult to outsmart sleep. Ever notice those times where you are able to get by on less sleep for a night or two—only to then find yourself needing extra sleep to “catch up” a day or two later? This is what is known as “sleep debt”—the accumulated sleep lost to poor sleep, sickness or simply staying up too late. The good news is that some research suggests that the accumulated sleep debt can be worked down or “paid off.”

CPAP Talk By Susan Gunwall, LPN, WSDC Clinical Coordinator and Director of Operations

Sleep Hygiene Techniques

Whether you use CPAP therapy or not, good sleep hygiene is essential to healthy, restorative sleep. Below are some simple but important tips for a good night's sleep.

1. Go to bed at the same time each day. Your body has a natural clock and becomes used to rhythms and routines. Turn your CPAP machine on and the light off as soon as you get into bed.
2. Get up at the same time each morning, even on weekends or after a poor night's sleep. Maintain the routine and rhythm you have established.
3. Understand your sleep requirements. Most people need around 8 hours of sleep for normal memory and cognitive function. You should use your CPAP device when you sleep all night, every night (if applicable).
4. Avoid napping during the day; it can disturb the normal pattern of sleep and wakefulness.
5. Exercise regularly, but finish your exercise routine at least two hours before bedtime.
6. Create a comfortable sleeping environment. Make sure your bedroom is cool, quiet and dark. A cool (not too hot or too cold) bedroom is most conducive to sleep--but if you use a humidifier with an older CPAP device, you may need the room a little warmer to avoid condensation in your tubing (rainout). Avoid distracting noises and light. If you don't have a comfortable bed, bedclothes or pillow consider changing them.
7. Use your bed only for sleep and sex. Avoid watching television, studying, eating or working in bed. Your brain should associate bed with sleeping.
8. Feel relaxed and warm before bed. A warm bath may help you wind down.
9. Leave your CPAP mask on and detach the tubing from the mask if you need to get up during the night. When you get back to bed, it's easier to re-attach the tubing than to refit the mask.

Sleep Hygiene:

Refers to the habits, environmental factors, and practices that may influence the onset, length and quality of one's sleep.

Sleep Fact:

A poorly fitting or worn out mask seal can be the difference between success and failure on CPAP therapy.

About Whitney Sleep Diagnostics & Consultants

Founded in 2008, Whitney Sleep Diagnostics & Consultants (WSDC) was created to serve patients living in areas where access to comprehensive sleep medicine has not been available. WSDC is owned and operated by Dr Courtney Whitney, who is Board Certified in Sleep Medicine.

Instead of making patients drive to the next larger town, or settling for diagnostic-only sleep testing services, we partner with hospitals in smaller towns to provide the same level of sleep medicine care that would be found in a major metro market.

Hospitals that partner with WSDC, are able to offer a high quality, AASM accredited sleep medicine program to their patients right at their home town hospital. WSDC diagnoses and treats all 84 known sleep disorders. **If you are a patient reading this in a waiting room or clinic lobby, your hospital partners with WSDC.**

Patients who feel they may have a sleep disorder are encouraged to talk to their healthcare provider about their symptoms. A simple one page screening form can often help determine the need for an overnight sleep study.

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