

Healthy MOM™

Diagnosing sleep difficulties

by Kay Yanit, RN, BSH, CLNC

How often do you find yourself trying to keep one eye open?

Being a mom with young children provides all sorts of gifts. Lots of love, joy in watching them grow and plenty of fun activities. All the while you are trying to stay awake after a night of wake-up calls. Most moms with young children miss hours of deep sleep each night. However, as your children grow you may still experience sleep problems that need to be addressed.

Lack of long-term sleep is a widespread problem in America, affecting not only our mental alertness, mood and ability to focus during the day, but also our health. Chronic, long-term sleep issues affect more than 40 million Americans, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke—and an additional 20 million people have occasional sleeping problems.

Stress-related insomnia, sleep disorders, lifestyle habits, and the failure to establish and maintain a regular routine

are all to blame. Getting enough sleep is an essential part of keeping the body healthy and avoiding chronic disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, insufficient sleep contributes to the development of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, depression and obesity.

The most common sleep issues include:

- » Caring for young children and attending their wake up calls
- » Insomnia – difficulty falling and remaining asleep
- » Sleep apnea – or the lack of proper breathing while sleeping
- » Restless legs syndrome – aches and pains in the legs that make it difficult to fall asleep and remain asleep
- » Narcolepsy – excessive daytime sleepiness that sometimes results in “sleep

attacks,” sudden and unpredictable episodes of sleep during the day.

Sleep in women is also influenced by the menstrual cycle, biological life stage, stress level, health, mood, parental status, work hours and other life responsibilities.

As we age, sleep patterns change and sleep issues become even more common. A person may sleep less, experience fragmented sleep—dozing and waking in irregular patterns—or have more difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. These changes may also be caused by a chronic illness or medication. Also, as we age, our bodies produce less of the chemicals and hormones that help us sleep well, such as growth hormone and melatonin.

Diagnosing Sleep Disturbances

If you're having trouble falling or staying asleep, or experiencing daytime drowsiness, a sleep study can diagnose potential disorders and help with treatment. A sleep study is performed in a controlled environment while you sleep and is supervised by medical professionals trained in sleep disorders. Your body is observed and monitored to

Continued on page 9





Meet Healthy MOM™

Kay Yanit, RN,BSN,CLNC is a mother of two daughters, Keenan and Lindley. She has worked as a Pediatric ICU, Neonatal ICU and Labor and Delivery nurse for 30 years. She currently works with moms and babies at the Women's Health & Birth Center at McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center in Springfield, Oregon. You can reach Kay at 541-741-4649. See what moms are talking about with Kay on the MOM Blog at www.mommag.com.

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Continued from page 8

see what occurs during sleep, from snoring to halted breathing.

Treatment

If you have a sleep disorder, it's important to seek diagnosis and treatment. Treatment may be as simple as lifestyle changes, such as losing weight, changing diet, quitting smoking, or taking certain medications such as a topical nasal decongestant.

Other treatment options may include surgery or the use of medical devices to help you breathe easier and sleep better. A continuous positive airway pressure device is commonly prescribed for people with moderate to severe sleep apnea. Consisting of a mask and air machine, a CPAP device delivers a steady, gentle stream of air, to keep the tissues of the nose and throat open during sleep. Other helpful devices are a humidifier in the bedroom, or special pillows to promote proper sleeping positions.



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If you or your partner have symptoms of a sleep disorder, talk with your doctor about participating in a sleep study. To learn more, visit www.mckweb.com; click on "Health Resources" and "Interactive Tools," and take the Sleep: Test Your Knowledge assessment, the Sleep Quiz or the Sleep Apnea Quiz. Or, call 541-744-8525 for an appointment.

Remember that this information is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor, but rather to increase awareness and help

equip patients with information and facilitate conversations with your physician that will benefit your health.

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