

# Better sleep

# During Menopause and perimenopause

## Why Can't I Sleep?

Pre and post-menopausal women may experience difficulty staying asleep and falling asleep and general insomnia. When estrogen and progesterone decrease, cortisol, a stress hormone, can become a major player and getting into a deep sleep is more difficult. Night sweats are a very common symptom and will affect a woman's sleep quality.

### Pre-Menstrual Insomnia

*Progesterone has a sedative effect and just before the period it will plummet. In perimenopause there is less progesterone and it can drop more dramatically.*

- Try the herb Vitex but be sure to take it regularly (will take at least 2 cycles to have an effect)
- Mark the day in the cycle when insomnia occurs and plan for a more difficult sleep- knowing ahead of time can help you stay calm
- Keep in mind that lying down in a calm state is somewhat restful and your amazing body will be able to cope with the day ahead

### General Insomnia

*Cortisol is meant to be high in the morning and lower in the evening. Hormonal shifts along with poor sleep hygiene can mean that cortisol is higher at night.*

- Take an adaptogenic herb like ashwaganda
- Practice deep belly breathing on a regular basis
- Magnesium and B6 may lower cortisol
- Melatonin- supports healthy circadian rhythms
- Glycine- an amino acid that promotes melatonin and serotonin may help
- Taurine- an amino acid that promotes the calming neurotransmitter GABA may help

### Night/Early Wakings

*When cortisol is more prominent, we can wake in the night or early morning with a list of things that need to be done and/or all the potential horrible things that could happen.*

- Get into a super chill state before bedtime- hot baths, herbal sleep blends, calm music can help
- Have a snack before bed
- Use earplugs, good blinds and/or an eye mask
- Take melatonin in the evening before bed but to avoid drowsiness don't take it if you wake in the night or early morning
- If you wake up to pee, don't turn any lights on

### Night Sweats

*Probably the most common sleep disruptor of all and can start in early perimenopause and into the post-menopausal years but generally improves after menopause.*

- Keep your room cool and use cotton sheets
- Wear pyjamas that will wick sweat away
- Avoid spicy food in the evening
- Wear socks to bed- strange, eh?! But can lower the core body temperature
- Load up on phyto-estrogens from legumes, fruits and vegetables as this can reduce hot flashes
- Drink sage tea- may help reduce hot flashes

## Improving Overall Sleep Quality

- Exercise regularly- this is known to improve sleep
- Stay away from screens 30-60 minutes before bed
- Meditate or practice deep breathing at night
- Maintain a healthy relationship with your bedroom; it is an area of calm. If you're stressed and feeling wide awake, get out of bed and return once you're more relaxed
- Limit caffeine and don't have any after noon
- Aromatherapy with high-quality calming oils may help
- Drink calming herbal teas like valerian, lemon balm, sage, or lavender in the evening
- Having a small amount of water before bed may reduce bathroom trips in the night
- Medical hormone therapy is not right for everyone but can address all hormonal sleep issues

**If poor sleep is affecting your ability to cope and/or your mood on an ongoing basis, it's important that you speak with your health care provider**

**Please speak with a health care specialist before starting any new herb or supplement**

# Sleep (or lack thereof) Inspirations

If you google insomnia when you're up at night, you will get information on how important sleep is for both physical and mental health which is super stressful to hear! "Trying" to sleep stresses the body and it's better to change your thought patterns. In his book *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, Christopher K. Gerber, PhD says we can break the stress pattern by doing the following:

1. Remember how well you actually function on less sleep
2. Notice that lying peacefully in bed is a form of rest itself whether or not you fall asleep
3. Remember that the body will demand sleep when it really needs it, which isn't in this moment
4. Dedicate 30 minutes to being fully awake which might be enough time for the mind to shut off and begin to sleep

**Interesting fact:** Researchers have been studying the therapeutic effects of sleep deprivation as a means of treating depression.

**"Insomnia is my inspiration!" - Jon Stewart**

## Nap or No Nap?

*Napping can be very beneficial as long as you do it right. A common complaint about napping is that it can make you feel groggy and makes it harder to fall asleep at night. But those effects can be avoided if you limit your nap time. Set a timer for 20-30 minutes and lie down if you can. Turn off your phone and do whatever you need to do to make it comfortable and enjoyable (playing music, having a soft pillow, covering your eyes) and just close your eyes. You will likely not go into a deep sleep but you will find when the timer goes off you will feel refreshed. This short nap should not affect your ability to fall asleep later.*

## Food for Sleep

- Eat foods rich in magnesium, calcium and B-vitamins as they promote relaxation- eating a diet rich in whole grains, leafy greens, legumes, and a variety of vegetables can ensure you get these nutrients
- Avoid fatty meals late in the evening as they slow down digestion
- Eat foods rich in tryptophan such as nuts, meats, poultry, greens leafy vegetables, dairy products, cherries
- Eat food rich in melatonin like eggs, fish, mushrooms, nuts, cherries
- A warm cup of milk can be soothing and relaxing
- Cherry juice has been studied and found to be a somewhat effective sleep aid
- A banana sliced in half with some nut butter can be a good snack in the night if you're feeling hungry