

Good Night's Sleep: Treatment Can Relieve Seniors' Sleep Disorders

If that solid night of deep sleep is a thing of the past, as it is for many older adults, perhaps it's time to seek medical help. The two most common sleep disorders for older adults — insomnia and sleep apnea — can be treated.

“People should not wait, because sleep disorders have been shown to lead to serious health problems such as hypertension and stroke,” says Dr. Marcel Hungs, director of the Center for Sleep Medicine at University of California, Irvine Medical Center.

More than 50 percent of Americans 65 and older experience some form of sleep disorder. As people age, they spend less time in the deep stages of sleep that result in the most restfulness. Yet, older adults require the same amount of sleep — 7 to 9 hours — as younger adults.

Insomnia can be caused by stress, lifestyle and medical conditions such as depression, and Alzheimer's disease. Treatments include lifestyle modifications, drug therapies and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Sleep apnea is a condition in which breathing briefly stops during sleep. Because these episodes disturb sleep, seniors suffering from sleep apnea are often drowsy during the day. Complications from an insufficient amount of oxygen reaching the brain are serious and even potentially life threatening. CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) is one of a variety of treatments that improves sleep apnea. The Center for Sleep Medicine specializes in treating apneas with its CPAP clinic.

Want to learn more about sleep disorders? Hungs will be among the UC Irvine physicians speaking at the annual senior event on May 22 at the Crystal Cathedral. See the registration form in this issue.



Cardiovascular Disease: Women, Men Are Not Equal In Surviving Heart Attack

Did you know that more women than men die of heart disease? In fact, nearly 4 in 10 female deaths in the United States result from heart disease.

Women are at least as prone to the disease as men, if not more so when they are post-menopausal. Unfortunately, most research information available is geared toward men's heart disease.

“The most important thing is education, both for patients and the medical community,” says Dr. Dawn Lombardo, director of the Heart Failure Program at University of California, Irvine Medical Center.

Women, especially older adults, may have a greater tendency than men to have atypical chest pain, Lombardo says. Women may more often complain of symptoms such as shortness of breath, abdominal pain, nausea and unexplained fatigue. These are more commonly the signs of cardiovascular problems and heart attack in women.

“It's so nondescript that most women may ignore it or attribute it to noncardiac causes, but they definitely should consult with their physician,” Lombardo says. “And don't just attribute it to ‘getting older.’ There could be a medical reason why you're breathing harder when walking across the room.”

One other facet of heart health specific to women: Cardiovascular disease in postmenopausal women is two to three times higher than in premenopausal women of the same age.

“See your physician,” Lombardo says, “because 64 percent of women who die from heart attack had no prior symptoms. We can help you avoid that.”

Hear Lombardo's insights on heart failure at the annual senior event on May 22 at the Crystal Cathedral. See registration form in this issue.