



## Women's Health Specialists

# Improving Sleep Quality

With the curtailment in use of estrogen to treat menopausal symptoms, including night sweats, symptoms of insomnia increase. While not always associated by patients, complaints of lack of energy, difficulty concentrating and problem solving, or even mood changes such as irritability, and depression may be consequences of poor sleep quality. If restless sleep or these symptoms persist beyond a month, then you should schedule an appointment with your Primary Care Physician to evaluate the cause of your insomnia.

Sometimes serious underlying ailments exist, but the majority of the time anxiety or other issues are responsible. Prescription sleep aids, used on a short-term basis of less than a month, or episodically can be quite helpful according to sleep specialists. Likewise low dose estrogen works wonders especially for menopausal night sweats and hot flushes, removing the inciting event to sleep disturbances and hence their consequences. Women often return commenting, *"I feel like myself again."* We initiate hormone treatment at the lowest effective dose, and if using pills take them at bedtime to take advantage of peak blood levels.

Nevertheless, many menopausal women desire to manage insomnia "naturally." Here's a list of suggestions to help you:

- Maintain a regular sleep and wake schedule, including weekends
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine (warm bath, reading, listening to music)
- Create a sleep "sanctuary" that is dark, quiet, comfortable, & cool
- Use your bedroom for sleep and intimacy (no TV)
- Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before your bedtime
- Exercise regularly, but complete your workout at least 4 hours before bedtime to unwind
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol close to bedtime
- Put your worries away at bedtime (acknowledging that you'll deal with them the next morning)
- If you can't sleep within 20 minutes, get up and go to another room; return when drowsy
- Avoid naps. If you must nap, limit it to less than 30 minutes, and complete it by early afternoon

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