

Ask Leyla: How to get a good night's sleep

Q: I am a 78 year old man in great health. My weight is excellent and I exercise and run on a regular schedule. My problem is waking up after 4 hours and not being able to fall back to sleep. What causes this problem and how can I solve it?

A: I commend you for being proactive in your health and keeping yourself in shape. There may be several reasons for your insomnia.



First, let's talk sleep hygiene. Make sure your bedroom is completely dark when you go to bed. There shouldn't be any devices blinking at you (i.e., clock radio, computer, etc.) and no light coming through the windows. Get blackout curtains and shades if this is not the case.

One of the worst things to do before bedtime is use your computer or smart phone. The blue light transmitted from these devices inhibits melatonin production. The pineal gland in your brain senses that it's still "daylight" and won't secrete the melatonin you need for a good night's sleep.

Make sure your bedroom is at an optimal temperature for restful sleep. That's between 60 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit. When we go to sleep at night, our core temperature goes down a couple degrees. Call it a mini-hibernation that helps us stay asleep. You may not achieve this core temperature if your bedroom is too warm. If your bedroom is cool as a cave and you're still not able to stay asleep, taking Glysom at bedtime may help.

Other causes of insomnia are caffeine addiction and adrenal stress, which in many cases go hand in hand. Ingesting too much caffeine will disrupt sleep, period. But it will also cause your adrenals to secrete catecholamines and cortisol. These are "fight or flight" hormones that deplete magnesium, which further exacerbates insomnia.

Alcohol and certain medications such as antidepressants, ADHD meds, decongestants and antihistamines can rob your sleep. Sleep aids such as Ambien and Lunesta aren't much better for middle-of-the-night wake ups. They help you fall asleep initially, but that's about it.

Lastly, a feature of unstable blood sugar is waking up during the night for no apparent reason. Are you carb-loading for your runs? You may benefit from lowering your carb intake during the day and having a protein snack a couple of hours before bedtime to keep your blood sugar stable during the night. This can help you stay asleep.

To your health!