

While You Are Not Sleeping

To Dream the Impossible, First You Must Sleep!
- Marianne Cotter

If you are like many women, mid-life marks the first time since you married and started a family that you can enjoy being alone. The kids have left the nest, bringing to an end the day to day responsibilities of parenthood. You have earned the right to relax and get a good night's sleep. NO more waiting up, long past curfew, worrying about where your teenagers are. You and your partner have waited eagerly for this moment. Ah, alone at last.

The house is quiet. There are no distractions. Tomorrow is a busy day and you're looking forward to a good night's sleep, seven or eight hours of uninterrupted bliss. You plan to drift effortlessly into a deep, dreamy state. At least that was your plan.

Welcome to Reality

So you go through your usual nightly routine, taking off your makeup, cleansing and moisturizing your face. You apply the anti-aging cream (on which you just spent a fortune) in all the strategic places. No more sagging, no more wrinkles. It says so right on the jar. You may have to wait 6 to 12 weeks to see the results, but that's OK, you've got time. After brushing and flossing your teeth you take one last look at yourself in the mirror. You find that you're pleased at the woman staring back at you, even if you don't have your glasses on. Now you settle into your inviting bed, adjusting the pillows, getting cozy and warm under the covers. "Come, Mr. Sandman," you think, "I'm ready for you."

But he doesn't come. You change positions. You check the clock. It's already 11:30 p.m. But that's OK. If you fall asleep soon you will still get six hours of sleep. If you have a male partner, he is probably snoring already. But you're feeling anxious. "What's wrong with me? Why can't I go to sleep?" Soon you reach the begging stage. "Please! Oh please, let me sleep." I call this my "Sleepless in Seattle" scenario.

What's the Problem?

Difficulty going to sleep and staying asleep are two of the most frequent concerns I hear from women in mid-life. Not only do I hear it, I truly empathize with these concerns, because I have experienced them first-hand.

You may first notice difficulty falling asleep while transitioning through perimenopause. Difficulty staying asleep is one of the hallmark complaints during and after menopause.

No one needs to tell you why a good night's sleep is so important to your health and well-being. You know that without a restful sleep, your energy level and mood will suffer. You will be cranky, easily distracted and it may take every ounce of your patience not to snap someone's head off. You don't want to behave this way. This is not you. But after days, weeks and even months of poor quality sleep, your relationships and your health start to suffer.

Why Can't I get a Good Night's Sleep?

"I need help sleeping!" "I can't live like this much longer." "What's happening to me?" Women come to me with complaints like this almost daily. Three major factors contribute to mid-life sleep problems, including age, changes in hormone levels and stress.

Age

We have no control over our age, and unfortunately as you approach your mid to late 40's or early 50's you may start to experience difficulty sleeping. As a person ages, the amount of melatonin released in the body decreases and can cause sleep disturbances.

Change in Hormone Levels

Fluctuating hormone levels, particularly estrogen and progesterone during the mid-life transition, can disturb sleep patterns. In addition a third hormone that is important for a restful sleep can start to decline with age. This hormone is produced by the pineal gland and is called **melatonin**.

All three hormones are crucial for providing a good nights sleep but they have very different functions in a woman's body.

For example the hormone progesterone works by calming moods and also makes us sleepy. Estrogen balances body temperature and when estrogen levels drop during mid-life we start to develop hot flashes and night sweats which can cause us to wake up frequently at night. Melatonin produced by the pineal gland causes us to feel drowsy when darkness occurs.

Stress

Stress also contributes to sleep problems. Prolonged stress can eventually take its toll on your adrenal glands, reducing their ability to compensate for stress. If your adrenal glands are in good working order, however, they will take over for your ovaries after menopause and continue to produce natural estrogen for the body to use.

Sleepless in Seattle – Does it Ever End?

How long will these sleepless nights go on? Women who identify with the “Sleepless in Seattle” scenario described earlier are anxious for the answer to this question.

Let’s consider some practical steps you can take to bring back those “sweet dreams”.

Lifestyle changes and hormone therapy may help restore the quality of sleep you long for. And there is another choice available (I love choices) that has the ability to restore the quality of sleep you long for that is safe, non-addictive and has no after effects.

Lifestyle Changes...otherwise known in the medical field as *good sleep hygiene*

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day...even on weekends!
- Establish a relaxing ritual to wind down before bed, such as taking a hot bath, or practicing relaxation techniques
- Limit caffeine intake, especially after 2 p.m.
- Exercise regularly, but not within three hours of bedtime
- Stop smoking or, at minimum limit nicotine within two hours of bedtime
- Don’t use alcohol as a sleep aid, and limit alcohol within two hours of bedtime
- The time you spend in bed should be limited to sleeping and sex. Yes! There is sex after menopause
- Forgo naps if you are having trouble sleeping at night
- Keep the bedroom cool, dark and as quiet as possible

Hormones (estrogen and progesterone) are a viable option for some women. When given in the right dosage, hormones have helped provide temporary relief of insomnia, particularly if your hormone levels have been tested and found to be so low they couldn’t help put an ant to sleep. Keep in mind however, that hormones are for temporary relief, meaning that you shouldn’t expect to take them for the rest of your life. Healthy lifestyle choices, however, are a lifetime commitment.

Dreamerz – This line of sleep products is an all-natural alternative to pills. Dreamerz comes in three delicious forms: a soothing Dairy Beverage, divine Chocolate Pillows, and relaxing Fruit-Flavored Mixes. The clinically proven, active ingredients are a patented, low-dose (0.3mg) of melatonin to promote sleep, and Lactium®, a bioactive peptide, or PharmaGABA™, a natural calming agent in the brain, to promote relaxation. Dreamerz is all-natural, safe, effective, non-addictive and has no after effects, making it a ritual you can enjoy every night before bed.

Making healthy lifestyle changes and Dreamerz are my picks for ensuring a restful nights' sleep. Combined I can enjoy "sweet dreams" and all the energy I need to wake up and embrace each new day. At this age can life get any better?