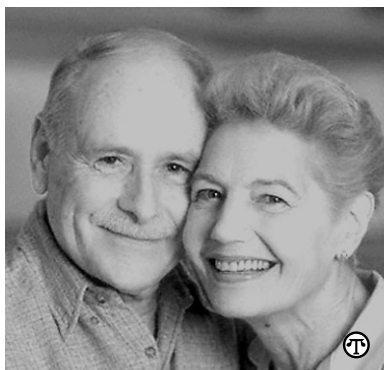


Difficulty Sleeping May Be More Than Normal Sign of Aging *Insomnia Is Problem for Older Americans*

(NAPSA)—If you or someone you know has been losing sleep over insomnia, you're not alone. For many older Americans getting a good night's sleep is harder than it seems. In fact, sleep medications are estimated to be among the most commonly prescribed medicine for older people. The National Sleep Foundation reports that an estimated 70 million Americans suffer from insomnia, a sleep disorder characterized by an inability to sleep or to remain asleep for a reasonable period of time. The condition, however, is common in older adults, due in part to bodily changes that occur with age.

People experiencing insomnia often have difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, waking too early and not being able to get back to sleep, or waking feeling unrefreshed and lethargic. Insomnia is a most prevalent sleep disorder, and is estimated to cost the U.S. economy nearly \$42 billion annually in direct and indirect costs. Although sleep may become more problematic in older adults, the need for sleep does not decrease with age. Sleep loss can cause cognitive difficulties, impaired memory and may contribute to decreased immune function in older people. Sleep deprivation can also lead to reduced energy, difficulty concentrating, diminished mood and greater risk for accidents.

There are a number of reasons sleep becomes more difficult as people age. First, the body goes through many changes that can impact sleep quality. One significant change involves the stages of sleep. With age, the amount of time spent in the deepest levels of sleep decreases, while the amount of time spent in the lighter stages



of sleep increases, which makes older adults more susceptible to waking from outside noises or bright lights. As people age, changes also occur in the body's internal clock that can trigger sleepiness earlier in the evening and cause them to wake very early in the morning and have difficulty falling back asleep. This disrupted sleep pattern often results in excessive daytime sleepiness.

Insomnia among older adults also can be caused by underlying medical conditions, such as pain disorders, Parkinson's or Huntington's disease, Alzheimer's, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression and dementia. Some medications commonly taken by older adults also may cause insomnia or daytime sleepiness, including some antidepressants and antihypertensives. Also, taking diuretics too close to bed time can result in frequent awakening due to nighttime urination.

Practicing good sleep habits can help older adults get the full night's sleep they need. Some tips for getting a good night's sleep include:

- Follow a regular sleep schedule and establish a relaxing bedtime routine.

- Create a safe and comfortable place to sleep (e.g., dark, quiet and cool).

- Use your bedroom only for sleeping.

- Avoid long naps during the day.

- Exercise at regular times each day.

- Avoid use of alcohol and cigarettes close to bedtime.

While many medications are available to treat insomnia, the most commonly prescribed drugs may pose safety concerns for older Americans, especially when taken for long periods of time. The most widely used medicines for insomnia are benzodiazepine receptor agonists (e.g., Ambien®, Sonata® and Halcion®), which are also called hypnotics because they suppress the central nervous system to cause sleep. Adverse effects can include impaired motor coordination, dizziness, daytime sedation, confusion and falls. Using these medicines with alcohol and depressants can be life threatening. According to a recent study, older adults who received benzodiazepines were at a significantly increased risk of hip fracture. Patients taking these medications also can develop drug dependence and abuse. Given these risks, use of these drugs among older adults should be carefully considered and closely monitored by their health-care providers.

Emerging treatments with new ways of working may have fewer side effects and may offer new options for older adults with insomnia. Older adults who have difficulty sleeping are encouraged to speak with their physician about insomnia and potential treatment options.