



Sleeping with Osteoarthritis

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Is Osteoarthritis Keeping You Awake at Night?

Many people who suffer from osteoarthritis don't sleep well due to discomfort. If you have osteoarthritis, you may experience occasional or chronic insomnia. Fortunately, there are actions you can take, starting today, that may help you to get a better night's sleep.

By using natural strategies you are likely to fall asleep quicker, stay asleep longer, and awake feeling more comfortable and refreshed.

Evaluate Your Habits

The first step to solving your insomnia is to determine what is causing it. You already know that you cannot sleep due to joint pain. But do you know if you have habits or circumstances that are making the pain worse?

Over-Exertion

For example, are you overdoing activities during the daytime and trying to accomplish as much as you were able to 20 years ago? It is important to be realistic about your imitations. Pushing through pain is not helpful when you have OA — it only leads to more joint damage, pain, and immobility. Give yourself permission to modify your goals and expectations.

Caffeine Consumption

It is important to examine other possible causes of insomnia. For example, do you drink coffee, black or green teas or sodas late in the day? Do you drink excessive amounts of caffeinated beverages early in the day? How much chocolate do you consume? Try limiting your intake of caffeine, especially after four in the afternoon, and see if that helps you to sleep better.

Is Your Room Sleep-Friendly?

Is your bedroom conducive to sleep? Do you pull the shades to darken the room? As you pull the shades or draw the curtains each evening, consciously remind yourself that you are also pulling the curtains on the worries and cares of the day. Mentally tell yourself that it is now time to rest. If you live in a noisy environment, purchase a white noise machine or fan to drown out disturbing sounds.

Nighttime Routines

What do you do before bedtime? Do you lay in bed and watch television or work at a computer? These activities can interfere with a good night's sleep. Better alternatives include taking a hot bath or soothing shower, having sex, reading a book, or sharing a massage with your partner. These activities will soothe your sore joints, help

you to relax physically and mentally, and promote a restful sleep for you.

Stress

Are you dealing with stress osteoarthritis causes effectively? If you are tense about living with pain and limitations of having a chronic condition or other stressors all day long, you will not sleep well at night.

What relieves your stress? Do you need to engage in a gentle but healthy exercise program? Yoga, walking and swimming tone your entire body without placing too much stress on your joints. They raise levels of stress and pain-relieving endorphins that allow you to rest better at night.

Bed Problems

It is vitally important that you sleep on a comfortable mattress. Several types of beds are available. See which ones fit your budget and provide you with the highest degree of comfort.

Buy the best bedding that you can afford. Many people are able to sleep better when they use extra pillows for positioning. Try sleeping on your side with a pillow between your knees. If you have upper extremity discomfort, elevate your arms on pillows. It may also help to wear comfortable sleepwear. Purchase sleepwear made of cotton, flannel or silk so that your skin will be able to “breathe.”

Next Page: Natural Sleep Aids and When to Seek Professional Help

Use Natural Sleep Aids

While you may need over-the-counter pharmaceuticals or prescription sedatives at times, you may be able to get a safe, good night's sleep by using natural substances.

Valerian and Hops

Valerian and hops are potent herbal remedies that work particularly well when used in combination. I recommend taking them as tinctures or as concentrated dry extracts for maximum effectiveness. Do not use hops if you are depressed. I don't recommend taking valerian and hops as a tea because they are strong tasting herbs.

Tryptophan

Tryptophan is a substance manufactured by the human body that promotes sleep. You can consume tryptophan by eating turkey, whole grains, yogurt, bananas, dates, chicken, fish, legumes, or nuts, and drinking milk. Have a light snack of a tryptophan rich food a short while before you retire for the night and you may find that you sleep better.

Melatonin

Your body makes a very important sleep-inducing compound called melatonin. If you have a deficiency of melatonin, you may benefit from purchasing an over-the-counter melatonin supplement. Initially, take 1.5 milligrams of melatonin one half hour before going to bed each night. Most people require less than 2 milligrams of melatonin for sleep promotion. You may gradually increase the dose to 5 milligrams nightly if needed, however.

Calcium

Do you take calcium supplements? If you do, try taking them in the evening. Calcium is a natural sleep aid. I recommend using calcium citrate or calcium as they are easily absorbable forms of the mineral. Make sure that the calcium supplement you take contains magnesium, vitamin D, and zinc — you need a combination product in order for the calcium to be utilized effectively by your body.

Magnesium is a gentle relaxant. I suggest using a calcium supplement that contains 1–2 grams of calcium and 1 gram of magnesium. An added benefit of taking a calcium supplement that contains magnesium is that magnesium can help to relieve restless leg syndrome, which keeps millions of people awake at night.

Essential Oils

Consider using aromatherapy oils in a diffuser or in massage oils. Many essential oils have sleep-inducing qualities. When used consistently, your mind will subconsciously associate the scent of the oils with sleep. When used in massage oils, essential oils reduce inflammation, promote relaxation, and reduce pain. Marjoram, ylang-ylang, lavender and rose are all good choices.

When to Seek Professional Help

If you employ natural approaches and still do not sleep well, consult with your health care provider. You may need prescription sleep aids.

If pain is keeping you awake, you might need to use a narcotic or non-narcotic pain reliever at night. Many types of medicines are very effective at relieving discomfort. If you try one and it does not work well for you, consult with your health care provider. Everyone reacts differently to medications. It may take some time to find a remedy that works best for you, so do not be discouraged.

You may need a referral to a sleep specialist. Other specialists who may be helpful include pain management specialists and mental health therapists. You may benefit from consulting with a practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine. Ayurveda, the science of life, offers many solutions for insomnia. An Ayurvedic practitioner may recommend meditation, specific herbs, dietary approaches, and many other interventions that may enhance your comfort and result in a good night's sleep.

Sleep is vitally important in order to live well and be healthy. Persevere until you are able to find a solution. There is an answer for your insomnia. Once you discover that solution, you will finally be able to get the rest and comfort which you need in order to live well despite osteoarthritis.