



Sleep & Multiple Sclerosis

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Living with MS

MSology Essentials Series

Sleep & Multiple Sclerosis

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Importance of a Good Night's Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep is essential to a person's physical and mental health. While you are asleep, your body continues to be active – healing and repairing tissues, regulating the balance of hormones, and maintaining physical, mental and emotional functioning. That is why people who are sleep-deprived have a higher risk of conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. Poor sleep also affects mental functioning, such as a person's mood, the ability to learn and remember, and the ability to concentrate, pay attention and make decisions. Being overtired makes you less alert and attentive – one of the reasons why most car accidents occur during the evening rush hour.

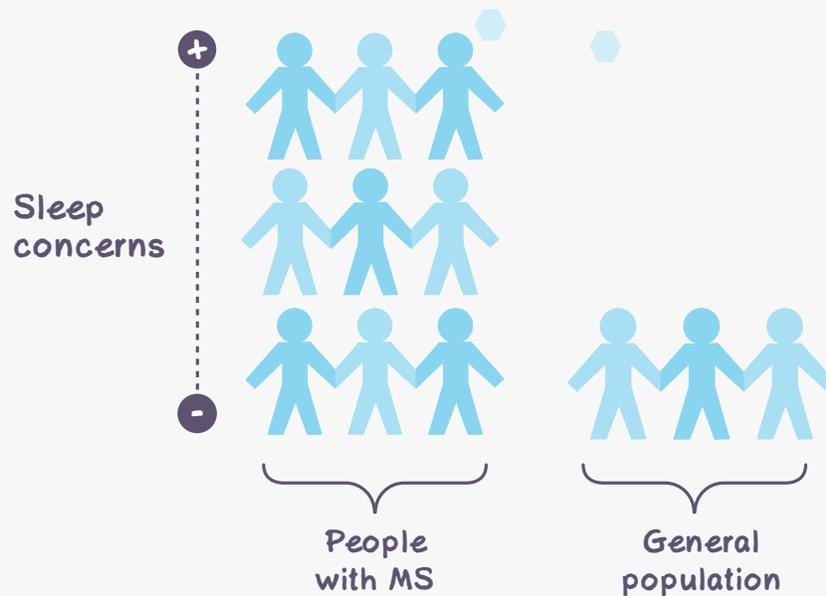
People with multiple sclerosis are especially prone to sleeping difficulties. Many – if not most – experience a sleep problem at some point, with some studies suggesting that sleep difficulties are three-fold more common in MS compared to the general population. The problem may be trouble falling asleep, or staying asleep, waking up in the middle of the night, or feeling more tired in the morning than when you went to bed.

In most cases, MS isn't the direct cause of sleep problems. But it is often an indirect cause. MS symptoms can make it difficult to fall asleep or to get a full night's rest. MS can contribute to other medical conditions that affect sleep. And some of the medications taken by people with MS can affect sleep quality.



But whatever the nature of the problem, sleep difficulties can be successfully managed. In this booklet we'll look at some of the common causes of sleep problems, discuss how treating MS symptoms can help you sleep, and provide some practical tips to help you get to sleep at night and wake up feeling refreshed.

Quick Fact



Sleep concerns have been reported to be three times more common in people with MS compared to the general population.



Insomnia or Fatigue?

Many people with MS experience some problem with sleep, but this may not be detected (by the person or their doctor) because it resembles MS fatigue. A majority of people with MS have fatigue – being tired, lacking physical or mental energy, and feeling weary and unmotivated. Insomnia can cause similar feelings of physical or mental exhaustion. And in fact, the two often go together: MS fatigue can worsen sleep, and poor-quality sleep can worsen fatigue.

An interesting finding from MS research is that people suffering from too little sleep typically don't say they're sleepy. They describe themselves as feeling tired, or low-energy, or fatigued. So perhaps it isn't surprising that people are more likely to receive help that is directed at their MS fatigue, rather than help for their sleep problem.



If you tend to doze off at the computer or while watching TV, the problem is more likely to be excessive sleepiness rather than MS fatigue.

If you are energized in the morning but feel progressively less physical and/or mental energy during the course of the day, the problem is more likely to be MS fatigue.



Am I Getting Enough Sleep?

Ask yourself...	Recommendation
How long does it usually take for me to fall asleep?	Ideally it will take no more than 15 minutes.
How many hours of sleep do I get?	Try to get 8 hours per night.
How many times do I need to get up in the middle of the night or early in the morning?	It's best if you sleep uninterrupted and don't have to get up at night.
In the past few months, have I had trouble staying awake while driving, eating a meal or at a social occasion?	Frequent episodes of sleepiness (more than once a week) are a strong indicator that you're not getting enough sleep.
How do I rate the quality of my sleep?	Poor sleep quality may indicate a problem such as sleep apnea. Talk to your family doctor or other healthcare provider if you rate your sleep quality as fairly bad or very bad. The two of you can discuss the difficulties you're having.



Energy drinks often contain a lot of caffeine. Avoid drinking any beverages containing caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, etc.) in the 3-4 hours before bedtime.



Common Sleep Problems in People with MS

Multiple sclerosis can affect your sleep in a number of ways. The following is a list of some of the more typical problems.

MS fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most common MS symptoms and many people feel so weary that they need to rest or have a nap during the day. Too much napping during the day may leave you less fatigued, but it will also make you less sleepy when it's time to go to bed. If you need to take a nap during the day, try to keep it brief – no more than 30-60 minutes – and avoid napping in the evening.

Depression and anxiety

Many people with MS have depressed thoughts or are anxious about their health and what the future will bring. Many of the physical and mental symptoms of depression and anxiety, such as unexplained aches and pains, agitation or restlessness, feelings of guilt, and excessive worrying can interfere with the quality of your sleep. Depressed and anxious feelings often make it difficult to fall asleep at night, or cause you to wake up early in the morning. Symptoms of depression and anxiety should be reported to your family doctor. He/she can advise you on the many treatments that are available, such as counselling, psychological therapies, or medications for depression or anxiety.



Pain

People with MS often suffer from pain syndromes, such as migraine, nerve pain, or aches and stiffness in the muscles or joints. Pain can make it hard to find a comfortable position in bed, or to relax and fall asleep.

Bladder symptoms

MS can affect the nerves and muscles that regulate how the bladder stores and releases urine. So common bladder symptoms in MS can include difficulty emptying the bladder, frequent urination (including in the middle of the night), a sense of urinary urgency, and episodes of incontinence. It's hard to have a restful sleep if you think you're going to have to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. It can help if you avoid drinking anything after dinner, then try to empty your bladder just before bed.

Limb disorders

Some people with MS suffer from a limb disorder, such as restless legs syndrome (RLS) or a periodic limb movement disorder (PLMD). People with RLS often experience pain and discomfort in their lower body and an irresistible urge to move their legs. PLMD is when you have sudden leg movements or spasms during sleep.



Breathing disorders

Sleep apnea is a common breathing problem in which breathing is interrupted or too shallow during sleep. This signals the brain to wake you up, which interrupts the normal sleep pattern. Even if you're not aware that your sleep has been interrupted, you'll feel it the next day as sleepiness, moodiness, a lack of alertness or feeling mentally fuzzy. You can also ask your partner – one sign of sleep apnea is loud snoring. Some studies have suggested that MS lesions in key areas of the brain may predispose a person to sleep apnea. Other common risk factors are obesity, aging, heartburn and sinus problems. Alcohol and smoking can also worsen sleep apnea. In contrast, it has been suggested that MS medications may make sleep apnea less severe by reducing inflammation in the brain.



Try to avoid drinking fluids for 3-4 hours before bedtime. Warm milk or herbal tea can help you fall asleep, but limit the amount of fluid you drink. Be sure to empty your bladder before going to bed.



10 Ways to Improve Your Sleep



Your bedroom

- 1** Make your bedroom your sleep sanctuary. Ensure that your bed, pillows and bedding are comfortable and inviting. A cooler temperature is better for sleep than an overheated room. Wear ear plugs if you are disturbed by noise inside or outside of your bedroom.
- 2** Do not use the bedroom for eating, watching TV, talking on the phone, working on the computer or playing on your tablet.



Your schedule

- 3** Keep to a regular schedule. Go to bed at the same time each night, and set your alarm for the same time each morning.
- 4** Have dinner early enough that you will have a few hours to digest before going to bed.
- 5** Try to exercise every day, but avoid exercising before bedtime. Exercise has a stimulating effect and makes it harder to fall asleep. Schedule your exercise for the morning, afternoon or early evening.



Your habits

- 6** If you have MS fatigue, avoid long naps in the middle of the day.
- 7** Avoid long periods of inactivity (watching TV, sitting on the sofa) during the day. Keeping active will help burn off some of your energy and make you sleepier at night.
- 8** Avoid caffeinated beverages (coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks) in the evening. Limit your fluid intake after dinnertime.
- 9** Try turning off your electronic devices one hour before bed.
- 10** If you don't fall asleep within 30 minutes of going to bed, get up and do something relaxing or tiring, such as reading. After 20-30 minutes, try again to fall asleep.



Light stretching, yoga, meditation or a warm bath before bedtime can help you sleep. But avoid hot baths because they can worsen your MS symptoms.



Medications That Can Affect Sleep

Many prescription and non-prescription medications can affect your sleep. The following are a few common medications that can be associated with sleep problems. **DO NOT** stop taking any medication without consulting your doctor beforehand.

MS medications

- Interferon-beta medications (e.g. Avonex, Rebif, Betaseron/Extavia) can cause fatigue, insomnia and poor sleep quality. Try taking your MS medication at a different time of day rather than before bedtime.
- Fampridine (Fampyra, Ampyra) is used to improve walking ability in people with MS. This medication has an activating effect and may cause anxiety, insomnia and other sleep problems. Take the medication in the morning and avoid taking it in the evening.
- Stimulants such as modafinil (Provigil, Alertec) are used to treat MS fatigue by promoting wakefulness. Avoid taking these medications in the evening or before bedtime.

Prescription medications

- Antidepressants, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (e.g. Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil), can worsen insomnia. If you are having sleep problems, **DO NOT** skip doses or stop taking the medication – these medications must be withdrawn slowly under the supervision of a doctor. Talk to



your family doctor if you think your medication is interfering with your sleep.

- Sedatives/hypnotics (“sleeping pills”) should generally be avoided because of their potential for abuse. Long-term use can worsen daytime fatigue and night-time insomnia.

Non-prescription medications

- Antihistamines (various brands) are used to treat allergies and stuffy nose, but are sometimes used as a sleep remedy because of their sedating effect. These medications should generally be avoided by people with MS because they can worsen daytime fatigue, worsen restless leg symptoms and insomnia, and contribute to cognitive impairment.



Don’t drink alcohol to help you get to sleep. Alcohol disrupts the normal sleep patterns so you will feel less rested and refreshed the next morning.





When Should You Contact a Healthcare Professional?

Sleep difficulties can have an impact on your overall health and sense of well-being. Some sleep problems need to be investigated by a healthcare professional to determine if they are being caused by MS symptoms (such as pain, muscle spasticity, etc.) or another medical condition (such as sleep apnea, depression, etc.).

Contact a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of the following:

- If you have MS symptoms that are making it difficult to fall asleep, are interrupting your sleep, or causing you to wake up early.
- If you need to urinate frequently during the day or in the middle of the night.
- If there has been a recent unexplained change in your sleep patterns.
- If you are waking up in the morning feeling more tired than usual.
- If a lack of sleep is interfering with your daily activities, such as driving a car, work or school tasks, planning and organizing, or remembering to do things.



Help!



Sleep may seem like something effortless, but it is a complex activity that can be easily disturbed by MS or other illnesses, daily stresses, a lack of exercise, medications, and a host of other factors.

If a poor night's sleep turns into an ongoing problem, talk to your family doctor about your concerns. He/she can help you manage any symptoms that may be interfering with your sleep, and can help you develop strategies to improve the quality of your sleep so you get the rest you need.





The MS Essentials series provides the latest information on multiple sclerosis medications, research, and lifestyle issues such as health, nutrition and exercise. All of the booklets are developed by Lind Publishing, publishers of MSology, to help people affected by MS remain active and informed.

MS Essentials is provided free of charge. The full series of publications is available for download at www.MSology.com



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