

Sleep After 60

Constructive Aging · A Program of the Arise Foundation

Your Best Night's Sleep — Understanding Sleep After 60

40 Years of Proven Life Management Skills Programs

Sleep is not a luxury. It is a biological necessity — as essential to health as food, water, and air. And yet for millions of older adults, it is the thing most reliably disrupted, most casually dismissed, and most poorly understood.

This guide is the foundation of the Sleep After 60 series. It explains what sleep actually is, why it changes as we age, and why those changes matter far more than most people realize.

What Sleep Actually Does

While you sleep, your body is not resting. It is working. The brain is consolidating memories, organizing the experiences of the day, and clearing out metabolic waste products that accumulate during waking hours. The immune system is producing cytokines that fight infection and inflammation. Hormones governing growth, stress, and metabolism are being regulated. Tissue repair is happening throughout the body.

Sleep is when the bill for a day of living gets paid. When it is consistently shortchanged, every system in the body shows the cost.

How Sleep Changes After 60

Sleep does change with age — but not in the ways most people assume. Older adults do not need less sleep. Research consistently shows that the sleep need — seven to eight hours for most adults — does not significantly decline with age. What changes is the ability to get that sleep.

The sleep architecture changes: older adults spend less time in deep, restorative slow-wave sleep and more time in lighter sleep stages. The circadian rhythm shifts earlier, causing earlier sleepiness in the evening and earlier waking in the morning. The brain's internal clock becomes less robust, making sleep more fragmented and more sensitive to disruption.

These are biological changes, not personal failings. They do not mean poor sleep is inevitable. They mean it requires more attention and more deliberate management than it did at forty.

What Poor Sleep Costs

The consequences of consistently poor sleep in older adults are serious and well-documented:

- Significantly increased risk of falls and accidents, due to impaired balance, reaction time, and judgment
- Worsening of virtually every chronic condition — heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, chronic pain
- Accelerated cognitive decline and increased risk of dementia
- Depressed immune function and slower recovery from illness
- Depression and anxiety, which both worsen sleep in a reinforcing cycle
- Reduced quality of life across nearly every measurable dimension

The Good News

Almost every sleep problem in older adults has a cause. And most causes are addressable. Medications, medical conditions, poor sleep habits, environmental factors, anxiety, and pain are all treatable contributors to poor sleep. The documents in this series address each of them specifically.

Better sleep is almost always possible. It usually does not require medication. It requires understanding, consistency, and a willingness to make deliberate changes. This series will give you what you need.

“Sleep is not what happens when you stop living. It is what keeps you alive to live.”

— **Edmund Benson, Constructive Aging**

What to Carry Home

- Older adults need just as much sleep as they did at forty — the need does not shrink.
- Sleep architecture changes with age, but poor sleep is not inevitable.
- Consistently poor sleep has serious, measurable consequences for health.
- Almost every sleep problem has a cause, and most causes are treatable.
- This series will address each contributing factor specifically.

If this program touched you, please consider a gift to Arise Foundation.
The Constructive Aging program is free to older adults and caregivers — made possible entirely by donor support.

Arise Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so your gift is tax-deductible.

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