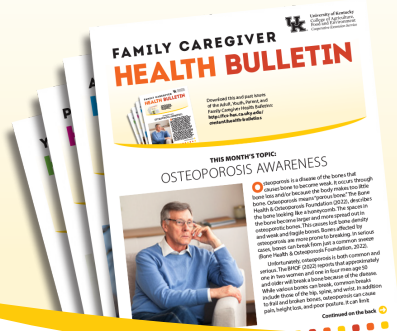


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



FEBRUARY 2024

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

FAMILY CAREGIVERS AND SLEEP



Family caregivers support the health and well-being of family members with chronic conditions and illness. Although caregiving can be a rewarding experience, it can also take a toll on a caregiver's physical and emotional health, including sleep. It is common for caregivers to experience poor sleep quality, such as short sleep duration, frequent night awakenings, and increased time to fall asleep. Figuring out what's causing poor sleep and changing it can improve a caregiver's quality of life.

Caregivers may struggle with sleep because of chronic worry, hypervigilance, listening for a family member while in bed, and attending to overnight caregiver needs (toileting, medication, re-settling, etc.). Types of caregiving also affect caregiver sleep quality. For example, nighttime dementia-related behaviors, including sundowning and agitation, can often disrupt quality sleep.

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If you are struggling with sleep, be sure to talk with a health-care provider.

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Various cancer treatments, conditions associated with pain, and hospice care are also associated with increased caregiver sleep disturbances.

One study says caregivers living with a care recipient report worse sleep than those who live apart.

The negative effects of poor sleep can last a lifetime. Poor sleep is associated with:

- Daytime sleepiness
- Impairment in daily function
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fatigue (physical and mental)
- Health problems (increased risk of stroke, obesity, diabetes, hypertension cardiovascular disease)
- Increased negative affect (negative emotions and expression, like sadness, disgust, lethargy, fear, and distress)
- Burden
- Distress
- Lack of focus or concentration
- Decreased reaction time
- Emotional instability
- Napping
- Cognitive problems
- Medication mismanagement
- Caregiver safety concerns (driving, operating equipment, mistakes at work)
- Caregiver errors (forgetting to administer medication, missing an appointment)

To improve sleep, some studies suggest trying meditation or yoga. Others recommend stress management, relaxation, and massages. Some caregivers find it helpful to work with a health-care professional to learn behavioral interventions like learning how to re-establish the relationship with sleep and the bed environment.

It is important for family caregivers to fall asleep and stay asleep. AARP suggests these five tips for better sleep:

- Create a sleep sanctuary that is dark, cool, quiet, and free from stressful paperwork and thoughts.

- Sleep in a separate room from the person for whom you provide care.
- Get a baby monitor to keep from straining your ears to hear your family member.
- Train yourself to worry during the day. Create to-do lists and note concerns you can put away until the next day.
- Establish proper sleep routines and sleep hygiene. In addition to maintaining regular sleep cycles, this may also include nightly relaxation, meditation, gentle stretching, and deep breathing exercises.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends these general tips for better sleep:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet, relaxing space.
- Set the thermostat at a comfortable temperature.
- No electronic devices in bed.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- Engage in physical activity throughout the day.

Sleep is restorative. Caregivers need sleep to maintain their own health and well-being as well as the health and well-being of their loved one. If you are struggling with sleep, be sure to talk with a health-care provider.

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Written by: Amy F. Kostelic,
Associate Extension Professor,
Adult Development and Aging

Edited by: Alyssa Simms

Designed by: Rusty Manseau

Stock images:
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