

Napping and Sleep Disturbances in the Elderly

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ABSTRACT: Elderly patients often describe sleep problems that present diagnostic dilemmas. This study sought to clarify the relationship between patients' reports of daytime napping and nocturnal sleep disturbances by surveying 132 older adults (ages 58-95). Prevalence, frequency, and duration of napping were analyzed with respect to (a) age and sex, and (b) indicators of nocturnal sleep disturbance, including awakenings, latency to sleep onset, and subjective estimates of sleep quality. Age had the greatest effect on napping, with older subjects taking more frequent and longer naps. Although a non-significant trend suggested that the duration of naps may be associated with increased difficulty initiating nocturnal sleep, no significant relationship was observed between any reported napping dimension and indicators of nocturnal sleep difficulty except for a small subgroup who used pharmacologic sleep aids.

KEY WORDS: sleep; sleep disturbances; napping; aging; gender differences; hypnotics/sedatives; geriatric medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Sleep problems are a common health concern among older adults. Studies indicate that more than 25% of persons sixty years of age or older report difficulty with sleep initiation or maintenance¹. Thirty-nine percent of hypnotics prescriptions are written for older adults², while 94% of nursing home elderly have been prescribed hypnotics³. The decreasing stability of nocturnal sleep patterns with age has been noted in both laboratory and subjective inquiries⁴⁻¹¹. Older adults tend to sleep more fitfully, to be more easily disturbed while

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