

# MENOPAUSE AND SLEEP PROBLEMS

by Mark Dobson



## DID YOU KNOW

Over 60% of perimenopausal women experience insomnia symptoms including difficulty falling asleep, frequent nighttime awakenings, waking up too early and being unable to go back to sleep, feeling tired and irritable during the day, and experiencing difficulty concentrating.

## INTRODUCTION

Menopause is a natural phase in a woman's life often accompanied by various challenges, one of the most common being sleep disturbances. The hormonal fluctuations that occur during this time can significantly impact sleep quality, leading to issues such as insomnia and Sleep Disordered Breathing (SDB).

## KEY POINTS

- Hormonal changes during Menopause
- Changes in hormones can affect sleep
- Hormones and their role in Sleep Disordered Breathing
- The role of magnesium during Menopause
- Mediterranean diet and Menopause
- Magnesium supplements
- How alcohol affects sleep
- 10 Points for Sleep Hygiene during menopause



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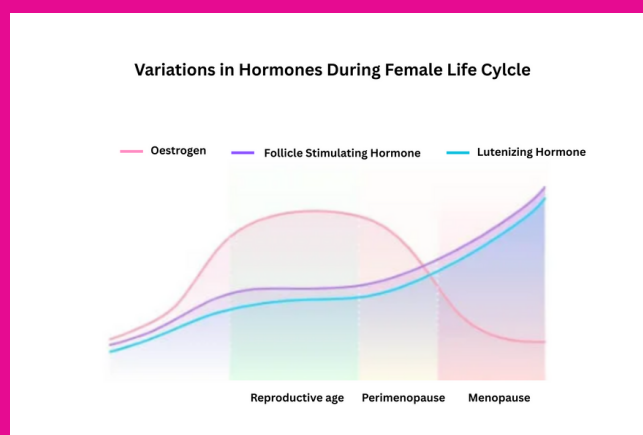
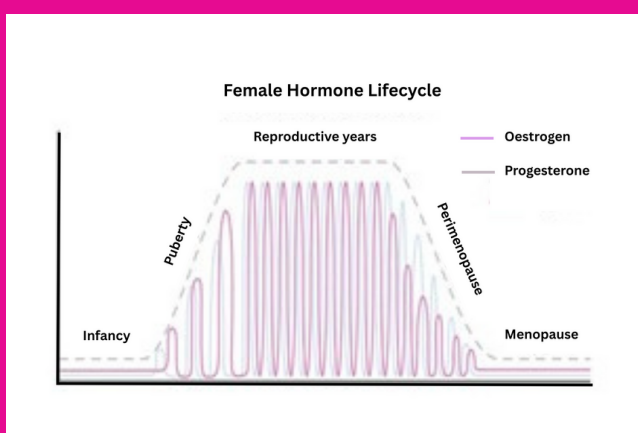
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# ARE YOUR HORMONES BALANCED FOR SLEEP OR ARE THEY KEEPING YOU AWAKE?



There are over 50 hormones in your body, each having a particular role in either starting or stopping various biological functions we rely on, they are our bodies chemical messengers. hormones are produced by the endocrine system and travel throughout the body to tissues and organs in the bloodstream. They can affect a range of body functions, including growth, sexual function, mood, metabolism, and reproduction.



Approaching the menopause, known as perimenopause, the three main hormones of oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone fluctuate and decline leading to various physical, emotional and cognitive changes.

Oestrogen the primary sex hormone, regulating the menstrual cycle and reproductive health. Progesterone prepares the uterus for pregnancy and maintaining pregnancy. And testosterone (present in smaller amounts than in men), maintains muscle mass, bone health and sexual function.

The decline in these hormones during menopause can lead to a plethora of symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, cognitive changes, and vaginal dryness. Furthermore, the reduced levels of these hormones can increase the risk of certain health conditions, such as osteoporosis and heart disease.

During the menopause the ovaries no longer respond to these hormonal messages, sent from the pituitary gland in the brain, which eventually leads to the end of ovulation and the menstrual cycle.



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# HORMONES AND SLEEP DIFFICULTIES DURING PERIMENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE



One in seven adults experience chronic insomnia with this number nearly doubling for women during the menopause phases with over 60% of perimenopausal women experiencing insomnia symptoms (difficulty falling asleep, frequent nighttime awakenings, waking up too early and being unable to go back to sleep, feeling tired and irritable during the day, and experiencing difficulty concentrating).

The reducing level of the three primary hormones can adversely affect the quality of sleep as the brain may produce less melatonin (the hormone integral for sleep). In particular, progesterone which increases the production of GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) another key chemical the brain produces for sleep. Progesterone also helps with relaxation and mood thus falling levels have been shown to increase anxiety, restlessness in limbs and middle of the night awakenings too.

Add to this the lowering and fluctuation of oestrogen causing hot flashes, we can understand how sleep during the menopause phases can bring on insomnia symptoms and even keep these anchored post menopause.



HRT (hormone replacement therapy) is shown to be effective in treating vasomotor symptoms, improving sleep quality and is one of the main therapies for Osteoporosis. If you are already taking HRT and feel your sleep is progressively getting worse, it is advisable to discuss this with your GP. Changing the level of progesterone may help with better quality sleep.

**TIP:** Try incorporating soy-rich foods, which are high in phytoestrogen (a chemical that mimics the effect of oestrogen in your body), into your diet. Avoid eating spicy food and other potential triggers for hot flashes.



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# SLEEP-DISORDERED BREATHING (SDB)



There is evidence that shows how the lowering of progesterone and oestrogen, which protect women from sleep apnea, during the menopause cancels out this protection as older women are just as likely to develop sleep apnea as are men.

Other sleep disorders like Sleep-disordered breathing (SDB) encompasses a range of conditions characterized by abnormal breathing patterns during sleep. The most common type is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), where airflow is blocked, causing pauses in breathing. Other forms include central sleep apnea and upper airway resistance syndrome. SDB can lead to serious health problems if left untreated. Also, studies have shown menopause reduces the amount of rapid eye movement sleep (REM) which is our cognitive restorative sleep, so when waking up lacking full Rem sleep cycles, the cognitive function is impaired.



## Normal breathing

During sleep, air can travel freely to and from your lungs through your airways.

## Obstructive Sleep Apnoea

Your airway collapses, stopping air from travelling freely to and from your lungs and disturbing your sleep.

At Sleep-focus.com, we screen you for SDB by asking you to complete a questionnaire and also, if you have a bed partner, for them too. If there is a clear indication that SDB may be present, we can arrange for a private home sleep study to confirm the type and extent and if necessary give advice on pathways for treatment.

For more information on this condition please visit the Sleep Better Clinic where Dr Ingleby explains more on this condition and treatment.



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# MENOPAUSE AND MAGNESIUM



## What does the research tell us about how magnesium helps our sleep during the menopause phases?

Magnesium plays a role in activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the one associated with 'resting and digesting'. This includes supporting the regulation of melatonin which guides the sleep/wake cycles in our body.

## What is magnesium, and how does it work?

Magnesium has an important role in processing enzymes in our bodies, affecting energy production, and muscle and bone health.

Its role includes:



**Mood and stress relief:** magnesium helps regulate cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, so it can help reduce feelings of anxiety and irritability.



**Improved sleep quality:** magnesium aids in the production of melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep, and helps people relax, making it easier to fall and stay asleep.



**Muscle relaxation and cramp prevention:** Magnesium is important for muscle function and relaxation, reducing leg cramps, muscle stiffness, and tension headaches.



**Bone density support:** Magnesium aids in calcium absorption and contributes to bone density.



**Heart health:** magnesium supports healthy blood pressure levels and reduces risk of cardiovascular issues.



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# 10 FOODS HIGH IN MAGNESIUM

Whole wheat, spinach, quinoa, almonds, cashews, and peanuts, dark chocolate, black beans, edamame (young soybeans) and avocado.



The NHS recommends women between 19 – 64 years old, aim for 270mg of magnesium a day in their diet.





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SLEEP THERAPY



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# WHICH MAGNESIUM SUPPLEMENTS ARE BETTER FOR SLEEP?



## Magnesium glycinate:



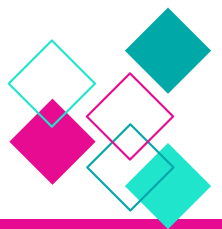
Magnesium glycinate is easy for the body to absorb.



It is used for its calming properties helping to promote relaxation.



When we relax our mind and body for sleep we reduce our cortisol levels (the stress hormone) that either work against us in falling asleep or maintaining sleep.



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# HOW ALCOHOL IMPACTS YOUR SLEEP



Alcohol acts on your nervous system and causes brain activity to slow down. We may feel this has a benefit in helping us sleep, but many studies show that alcohol actually disrupts sleep, especially rapid eye movement sleep (REM) our cognitive restorative sleep. REM sleep is reduced during the menopause, and alcohol exacerbates this further!



Alcohol increases the risk of obstructive sleep apnoea and central sleep apnoea. The reduction of oestrogen and progesterone during the menopause has already increased this risk!



Melatonin, the hormone essential for maintaining our circadian rhythm and sleep schedule can be disrupted from alcohol.



Dehydration reduces sleep quality and reduced dream sleep as the body tries to adjust leading to increased wake periods.



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# HOW ALCOHOL IMPACTS YOUR SLEEP



## Will a Small Amount of **ALCOHOL** Affect my sleep?



**Low** amounts of alcohol decreased sleep quality by **9.3%**

Less than 2 drinks for men and less than 1 drink for women



**Moderate** amounts of alcohol decreased sleep quality by **24%**

Approximately 2 drinks for men and only 1 drink for women

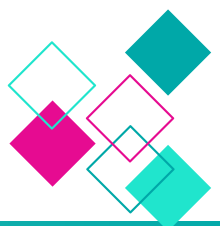


**High** amounts of alcohol decreased sleep quality by **39.2%**

More than 2 drinks for men and more than 1 drink for women

## Is there a better time to have a drink to help me relax?

Alcohol is absorbed into our blood stream very quickly and will remain there until the liver is able to metabolise it, which typically is at a rate of 1-unit per hour. So, to prevent alcohol disrupting our sleep architecture, stages of sleep, it is better to have say one glass of wine early in the evening allowing 2-3 hours for it to be metabolised.



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# SLEEP HYGIENE FOR THE MENOPAUSE



What can help?

Your 10 point sleep hygiene check list.

1

## LIMIT ALCOHOL

Limit the amount of alcohol consumed and allow time for it to be metabolised by only drinking earlier in the evening.



2

## THE BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

The bedroom environment should be as “cave-like” as possible. Cool (about 18 degrees), dark, and quiet. Eliminate sources of light from windows, doors, and electronic equipment. Turn the digital clock radio away from you or place it under the bed. If you can’t eliminate sources of light, consider a sleeping mask.



If you are unable to eliminate sources of noise, consider turning on a fan in the room, getting a white noise generator, or earplugs. Heavy curtains can also muffle outside noises. To cancel noise, don’t use television, radio, or any source of sound that varies in frequency or volume. Use a fan for ‘white noise’, especially if you are a light sleeper. White noise uses a mix of sound frequencies to create a static-like sound. It can be intense and high-pitched, like a fan or an air conditioner, and remove pets from the room.

If you have a bed partner who takes up most of the duvet then adopt the Scandinavian method of separate duvets.



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# SLEEP HYGIENE FOR THE MENOPAUSE



What can help?

Your 10 point sleep hygiene check list.

3

## LIMIT CAFFEINE

Limit total caffeine consumption and have none after noon. Caffeine can have a long half-life in sensitive individuals. Remember it's found not only in coffee, but tea, soda, chocolate, and OTC medications. If you're currently having more than five cups of coffee per day, consider tapering by mixing in decaf.



4

## MEALTIMES

Try to maintain consistent mealtimes and avoid heavy meals late in the evening. A light carbohydrate snack in the evening may promote sleep.



5

## SMOKING

If you smoke, avoid smoking heavily near bedtime and don't smoke during awakenings at night. You may inadvertently condition yourself to wake up frequently during the night.



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# SLEEP HYGIENE FOR THE MENOPAUSE



What can help?

Your 10 point sleep hygiene check list.

6

## LIMIT LIQUIDS

Limit all liquids during the last two hours before bedtime.



7

## REGULAR EXERCISE

Regular exercise may promote deeper sleep. However, there is relative decrease in body temperature associated with sleep onset and maintenance. Therefore, you should avoid strenuous exercise within three hours of bedtime, as it will raise body temperature and disrupt sleep.



8

## WARM BATH OR SHOWER

Research suggests a warm bath or shower an hour or two before bedtime can help you unwind and fall asleep faster. Why? It will help lower your core temperature, and that's a circadian sleep signal. Also let's consider how the warm water helps relax muscles and reduces pressure on the knees and joints, which allows the body to be fully supported. It increases circulation and reduces swelling and inflammation.



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# SLEEP HYGIENE FOR THE MENOPAUSE



What can help?

Your 10 point sleep hygiene check list.

## 9 SCHEDULE “WORRY TIME”

Schedule some “worry time” in the late afternoon or early evening. Use this time to plan activities for the next day or to think about things that may cause you to feel upset, angry, or anxious. It’s easy to get into the habit of thinking about worrisome things when you are in bed. It’s quiet, there are no distractions, and there are no other competing activities. It’s a very bad habit in terms of sleep.

Keep a pad and pencil handy, but outside the bedroom, so you can jot down ideas that seem important during the night. If you are awake enough to be aware that you are thinking of solutions to problems, you should be out of bed. Getting the ideas out of your head and onto a piece of paper may make it easier to get back to sleep.



## 10 TECHNOLOGY

Here is your modern-day technology challenge!

Remove all technology from the bedroom other than a standard alarm clock. Your brain may just wake you up to engage with your phone/ iPad/ laptop, TV, leading to light unrefreshing sleep!



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