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## Sleep: essential for seniors

It's a common misconception to think that seniors need less sleep than younger adults. Like younger people, older adults require seven to nine hours of sleep per night. At any age, sleep is essential to your physical health and emotional well-being. Seniors, however, are more prone to sleep disorders. In fact, one out of every two seniors suffers from sleep deprivation.

“The biggest myth is that sleeping poorly is just part of getting old. Actually, seniors are falling asleep during the day because they aren't getting enough quality sleep at night,” says Dr. Sonia Ancoli-Israel, Director of the Sleep Disorders Clinic at the San Diego Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

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*Daytime napping actually contributes to insomnia.*

## Fire safety for seniors: 7 hot suggestions

October 5-11 is National Fire Prevention Week. Every year, more than 27% of all deaths by fire are to people age 70 and over. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), adults over 65 years of age are twice as likely to die in a fire when compared to the rest of the population. Adults over 85 have a risk that is four and half times that of the national average. “Seniors are vulnerable because they often live alone or are unable to respond quickly,” says Ohio State Fire Marshal Michael P. Bell. “With education and

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## Home Care Assistance News

**Live Chat!** Have a quick question about home care you'd like answered right away? Home Care Assistance now offers a **Live Chat** link on our web site, [www.HomeCareAssistance.com](http://www.HomeCareAssistance.com). If an operator is available, you'll see a “Chat Now!” button near the lower left corner of the page. Just click that button and a chat window will pop up and live case manager will be ready to answer your general questions in real time.



When operators are busy or offline, you'll just see a button that says “Chat Offline.”

**New Location!** Home Care Assistance celebrates the opening of our newest office, located in **Charleston, South Carolina.**

*Sleep (continued):*

**Sleep deprivation can be deadly**

About one-third of adults older than age 65 experience falls each year. Falls and fall-related injuries are the leading cause of death in people 65 years and older—more than 15,800 deaths per year and rising. For people 85 and older, it's estimated that one in five falls results in death.

Women age 70 and older who sleep five hours or less per night may be more likely to experience falls than those who sleep more than seven to eight hours per night, according to a report in the September 8, 2008 issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine*. The study also found that the use of sleep medications does not appear to influence the association between sleep and risk of falling.

When seniors don't get the sleep they need at night, daytime drowsiness impairs their ability to perform normal activities—such as driving or concentrating on a task—and increasing the risk of having or causing accidents.

**Why seniors are losing sleep**

Aging itself doesn't cause sleep deprivation. Rather, ailments associated with aging—such as arthritis, physical disabilities, respiratory problems and depression—are likely to blame. Seniors' sleep cycles can also be disrupted by physical inactivity during the day, depression, anxiety and stress. Also, some prescription medicines taken by seniors may rob them of sleep.

**Age old solutions for sleep loss**

The body's circadian rhythms, a biological clock that controls sleep, naturally advances a few hours as a person grows older. This may cause older people to feel sleepier earlier in the evening and wake up earlier in the morning. Naps are not the answer to daytime drowsiness. Trying to catch up by napping during the day creates a sleep/wake cycle that interferes with normal sleep patterns.

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*Fire Safety for Seniors (continued):*

planning, many of these fire deaths and injuries can be prevented.”

The following suggestions are from the *Fire Safety Checklist for Older Consumers*, produced by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, the AARP and the National Association of State Fire Marshals.

1. Install smoke alarms and check them monthly. At least one smoke alarm should be placed on every floor of the home. Many states even have special programs that provide free smoke alarms to seniors, when available. Ideally, since many



people prefer to sleep with their doors closed, separate smoke alarms should be placed inside bedrooms and in outside hallways. Place alarms either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall. Follow the manufacturer's directions for testing the alarm. Change batteries at least once a year.

2. Be careful when cooking. Pot handles should be turned inward when cooking on a stovetop. Cooking surfaces and surrounding areas should be kept free from clutter and grease build up. Use pot holders and oven mitts. Avoid wearing loose clothing with flowing sleeves while cooking. Take a reminder with you if you must leave the kitchen with food cooking on the range top.

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### *Sleep (continued):*

Many sleep problems can be overcome simply by observing a senior's sleep patterns and helping them make lifestyle changes that will keep their internal clocks on time. This includes sticking to a regular sleep schedule, having your older loved one get up and go to bed at the same time each day.

Sleep and aging experts agree that the two most critical factors for getting a good night's sleep are what a person does during the day and his or her sleep environment.

**1. Staying active during the day.** Seniors should maintain a moderate level of exercise or activity during daytime, especially outdoors. Studies show that people who get natural daylight sleep better at night.

**2. Avoid consumption of caffeine and alcohol.** Consuming coffee, tea, chocolate, sodas or alcohol in the evening can interfere with nighttime sleep, especially in older people. Ending the ritual of a "night cap" will make the night more restful. Avoiding liquids before bedtime also reduces the need to use the bathroom at night.

**3. Improve the sleeping environment.** Experts advise that a good sleep environment is one that is quiet, dark and on the cool side. Lumpy, sagging or worn mattresses may also be part of the problem. "Many older people tend to keep the same mattress for years and often overlook a worn-out mattress as a cause of poor sleep," says Andrea Herman, Director of the Better Sleep Council.

**4. Sleep separately from restless partners.** People who share a bed with partners who are restless, snore, or have an illness are likely to be sleep-deprived. When necessary, moving to a separate room can help both partners sleep better at night.

Some causes of insomnia may be due to medications or due to depression or medical conditions that are treatable with medications. Therefore, if sleep problems persist, it pays to seek a doctor's advice.

## Caregiver spotlight

T. Ann Snaer, a caregiver from the San Diego County HCA office, has extensive experience in home care and has earned CNA and HHA certificates.

As a live-in caregiver, T. Ann noticed a change in her current client's motor coordination. She



*Caregiver of the Month:  
T. Ann Snaer with  
client, Marinell F.*

reported her observations to the nursing staff at a local medical center, but they ignored her. Still, she persisted, taking her concerns directly to her client's physician, son and the local hospital. After continued hectoring from T. Ann, her client's doctor finally reviewed her

medication and diet regime and made adjustments which immediately improved her condition. Her client's son credits T. Ann with saving his mother's life, saying,

**"It was only T-Ann's critical observations that saved the day. I have come to trust T-Ann's assessments...I can feel her empathy for my mother's situation and I know she is always looking out for her best interest."**

T. Ann says her philosophy of helping seniors includes listening attentively to find the most effective ways to serve the client, continually communicating with the client's support team, instilling hope by bringing a positive attitude to the job, encouraging involvement and diversion by taking client on outings and visits to friends and engaging in laughter by always finding something to laugh at, including yourself.

## Senior care news

### Seniors May Need to Avoid Grapefruit, Other Juices with Medications

New research finds life-saving drugs may become ineffective, if patient consumes grapefruit or even other common fruit juices, including orange and apple.

Consult with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any medications with grapefruit juice or other fruits and juices.

Drugs often prescribed for senior citizens fighting life threatening conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, organ-transplant rejection and infection, may become ineffective if the patient consumes grapefruit or even other common fruit juices, including orange and apple.

Scientists have known for years that the furanocoumarins in grapefruit juice can increase the absorption of certain blood pressure and cholesterol drugs—potentially turning normal doses into toxic overdoses.

Now, the researcher who first identified this interaction is reporting the new evidence that common fruit juices can do the opposite—substantially decrease the absorption of drugs, potentially wiping out their beneficial effects.

“Recently, we discovered that grapefruit and these other fruit juices substantially decrease the oral absorption of certain drugs undergoing intestinal uptake transport,” says study leader David G. Bailey, Ph.D., a professor of clinical pharmacology with the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. “The concern is loss of benefit of medications essential for the treatment of serious medical conditions.”

### *Fire Safety for Seniors (continued):*

- 3. Heat the home safely.** Have a professional inspect and service all heating equipment annually. Keep anything that can burn or melt far way from all furnaces, heaters, fireplaces and water heaters. Never use a stove or oven to heat the home.
- 4. Smokers: use smoking materials safely.** People should never smoke in bed, while drowsy or while under the influence of medication or alcohol. Ashtrays should be large and deep for smoking debris, and the contents should be cool before disposing of them.
- 5. Practice electrical safety.** Have a professional electrician inspect the home’s wiring every ten years and make recommended repairs. Homes more than 40 years old are three times more likely to catch fire from electrical causes than homes that are 11 to 20 years old because most older wiring was not designed for the capacity of today’s appliances. Each appliance should be plugged directly into its own outlet. Avoid using extension cords.
- 6. Keep matches and lighters away from children** if they are present or visit the home. If children are present, store matches and lighters in a locked drawer or a high cabinet far out of a child’s reach. Make sure lighters are child resistant.
- 7. Know what to do in case of fire.** Know two ways out of every room in the home. Get out as soon as you discover a fire. Do not try to fight the fire or gather possessions. Once out of the house, dial 9-1-1 immediately, preferably from a neighbor’s home.

Knowing and practicing these tips is an excellent practice for everyone. If you’re caring for a senior, share this information or conduct your own inspection to ensure the home is as safe as can be.