

Aging Well with Muscular Dystrophy: Sleep Problems and Medications

By researchers at the University of Washington's Aging Rehabilitation Research and Training Center

In our last column, we discussed a number of factors that can cause sleep problems, such as pain and different types of medications. In this column, we will look more in depth about ways that medications can disrupt sleep patterns, and how to resolve these issues. As with any issues or questions you may have related to your medications, your doctor should be the first person you talk with. Pharmacists can also be excellent resources for information about medications.

Sedatives or benzodiazepines

A class of sedative medications that are sometimes prescribed for sleep are called benzodiazepines. Examples of these medications include Valium©, Xanax©, Klonopin©, Seresta©, and Restoril©. These drugs are often prescribed for insomnia (difficulty falling asleep). But these medications can actually have a negative impact on sleep by inhibiting REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. REM sleep is inhibiting

term use can lead to tolerance (requiring more drug to get a similar effect), dependence, and withdrawal when discontinued. Tapering to reduce or stop the medication is necessary. Some research shows that aging people are more sensitive to the effects of the drug.

Another commonly prescribed medication, Lunesta[®] (or eszopiclone) also acts like benzodiazepines. It can be helpful for short term relief from sleep problems but can lead to dependence and withdrawal over the long term. Like all medications, it's important to talk to your doctor before you start or stop Ambien[®] or Lunesta[®].

Antidepressants

A class of drugs called "antidepressants" can also help people fall asleep. Examples of antidepressants are Trazodone[®], Amitriptyline[®], Paxil[®] and Zoloft[®]. These medications help to restore a healthy sleep cycle, including both REM sleep and deep sleep. These positive effects occur even

for sleep, and to know the costs and benefits of each type of medication. We cannot emphasize enough that, for your health and safety, it is of utmost importance to always talk with your doctor if you're thinking about starting, stopping, or changing any medications.

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