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Sleep and Men's Sexual Health

"Sleep is for wimps," Larry boasted in the office break room one morning. "I can get by on very little sleep. I worked past midnight last night, in fact."

Derek poured himself a cup of coffee and rolled his eyes. "It's not a badge of honor," he grumbled to himself.

But many people feel that sleep is overrated. There's a push to go-go-go without stopping to rest.

Unfortunately, lack of sleep takes a toll on the body in so many ways. We need that time to let our body do its repair work and to keep ourselves rested and alert for the next day's challenges.

You might not realize that sleep is important for sexual health, too. Both men and women need proper sleep for good sexual function. Today, we'll focus on some issues particular to men.

Sleep and Testosterone

[Men's bodies produce testosterone during sleep.](#) Produced by the testes, the hormone testosterone plays a huge role in a man's sexual function. It drives his libido and contributes to his erections.

In 2011, scientists from the University of Chicago reported on a group of young men who participated in a sleep and testosterone study. After a week of sleeping less than five hours a night, the men's testosterone levels dropped 10% to 15%.

Sleep and Sexual Judgment

[When sleep deprived, men can misjudge a woman's sexual interest.](#) Researchers from Hendrix College in Arkansas surveyed a group of 60 college students before and after one night of sleep deprivation. The students answered questions about their views on sexual interest, intent, and commitment.

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When men had less sleep, they tended to rate women's sexual interest and intent much higher than they did when they were rested. Interestingly, the opposite was not true for the women. Their perceptions of men's sexual interest and intent did not change much after a night of poor sleep.

Sleep Apnea and Erectile Dysfunction

Sleep is important for erections, too. Past research has linked obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) with [erectile dysfunction \(ED\)](#) – the inability to get or maintain an erection firm enough for sex.

When a man has OSA, his airway becomes blocked while he sleeps. As a result, he stops breathing for short periods during the night. These episodes occur repeatedly.

In 2011, researchers from Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York reported on a [study of over 800 middle-aged men](#). They found that in this group, men with ED were more than twice as likely to have obstructive sleep apnea. OSA was even more common in men with severe ED.

Fortunately, OSA can be treated. Many patients use a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine to keep the airway open during sleep so that they can breathe more easily. The device involves a special face mask, which is attached to the machine with a hose.

Some men worry that using a CPAP machine may make them less sexually attractive. But that isn't necessarily true. [A recent study compared](#) two groups of men with ED – one that used their CPAP machine regularly and one that did not.

The men completed questionnaires about their sexual quality of life. After analyzing the data, the researchers found no significant differences between the groups. The CPAP machine did not disrupt the men's sex lives.

Get Some Sleep!

If you have problems sleeping, consider adjusting your bedtime rituals. Try to minimize stress and relax at night. Some people find it helpful to shut off all electronics for an hour or two before bedtime.

If the trouble persists, talk to your doctor. He or she can suggest some other strategies. You might also consider attending a sleep lab for a few nights to see if there is a deeper problem, such as obstructive sleep apnea.

Resources

[Sexual Medicine Society of North America](#)

“CPAP Device Does Not Interfere With Sex Life, Study Says”

(November 26, 2014)

<http://www.sexhealthmatters.org/news/cpap-device-does-not-interfere-with-sex-life-study-says>

“Sleep Deprivation & Sexual Judgment”

<http://www.sexhealthmatters.org/did-you-know/sleep-deprivation-sexual-judgment>

“Sleep Problems and ED”

(June 14, 2011)

<http://www.sexhealthmatters.org/news/sleep-problems-and-ed>

“Testosterone and Sleep”

<http://www.sexhealthmatters.org/did-you-know/testosterone-and-sleep>