

gerontology

A. Jolayne Farrell

The aged may need more sleep, not less

Dear Jo: My problem may be a common one in people my age (I am 74). I have difficulty falling asleep and then I'm wide awake at 5 a.m. My wife still sleeps her usual eight hours. Do most older people need less sleep?

Dear Mr. Morley: Sleep patterns change throughout the life span. The amount of sleep that an individual needs varies. Each person must find the amount that works best for him or her. Eight to nine hours seems to continue to be the average needed in later years.

Your problem is a common one. One study of older persons reported that 40 percent of those participating had definite sleeping problems and awoke tired and exhausted.

Some researchers insist that people need less sleep as they grow older. However, what appears to be a need for less sleep may be the result of chronic disease (86 percent of persons over 65 have one or more chronic diseases), anxiety, depression, boredom, or possibly lack of exercise.

Generally, the sleep pattern for older people is that it takes longer for them to fall asleep and they have more frequent awakenings. Time in bed, not necessarily sleeping, also increases with age. Many older people spend eight to nine hours in bed but actually sleep only seven to eight hours.

During adult life, women sleep differently from men. It has been found that women spend more time in bed, sleep more and do not awaken during the night as often as men do.

Catapsms throughout the day and early morning awakening are quite common among persons who are inactive. Daily naps can be very beneficial if they are not too long or frequent. Naps can actually relax a person and thus contribute to a better night's sleep. One has to be careful not to have a day-night sleep reversal.

Older people often need more sleep, not less, if they suffer from degenerative disease, such as arthritis. Chronic illnesses are fatiguing and sleep can be somewhat of an "energizer."

Sleeping pills are sometimes helpful, although many older people have a sleeping pill "hangover" the next morning and find that for several hours after awakening they have a problem doing their morning tasks. This is probably due to the increase in the percentage of body fat found in older people, which increases from a total of 14 percent at age 25 to 30 percent at age 70. Certain sleeping medications are stored in fatty tissue.

There are some simple bedtime rituals that are quite helpful, for example, a warm bath, sleeping in a well-made bed, bed boards for back support, back massage and a cup of warm milk. Some find that reading a book in bed helps them to have a good night's sleep.

Heating bills can be reduced for seniors, gas company says

Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. informed senior citizens of various plans to help them with their heating bills at a booth set up recently in the Westland Shopping Center.

It was manned by members of the company retirement organization called American Natural Resources Retirement Club.

Senior citizens who dropped by could pick up information on the company Winter Shut Off Protection program, which helps seniors budget their gas bills on a year-round basis.

Facts could also be obtained about financial assistance in the paying of heating bills for low-income persons. It is paid through the federal windfall profits tax program.

Other news the company wished to spread is a rate order from the Michigan Public Service Commission, giving seniors a small financial break on heating bills. The savings has been estimated at about \$20 a year for an average customer.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO we began to code the accounts of seniors," said Fred Shell, director of public issues and planning at Michigan Gas. "We wanted to minimize their worries over having their service discontinued because they couldn't pay. If we know you are a senior we will not discontinue gas service even if you fall behind in your payments."

"We then try to come up with a settlement agreement with you which will spread the costs through the summer months."

The volunteers at the booth also passed out brochures in which the gas company offered to put senior citizens "in touch with a Michigan Community Action Agency or an Area Agency on Aging," which can determine if they meet income eligibility requirements for financial assistance with their heating bills.

According to Fred Shell, \$96 million came to Michigan as part of its share of the windfall profits tax. It has been allocated to the state program to help low-income individuals with their heating bills.



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

A senior citizen from Redford township examines a Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. information display at the Westland Shopping Center recently. The gas company has devised various plans to help senior citizens with their heating bills.

Urban culture is LIT topic

Edmund Bacon, author, architect, and urban planner, will present the second in his three-part "Architecture" series at Lawrence Institute of Technology at 7:30 p.m. Thursday.

Bacon will make a visual presentation entitled "The American Urban Experience" on the country's cities and urban culture.

The program will be in the architecture auditorium on the LIT campus, 21000 West 10 Mile (near Northwestern Highway) in Southfield. All architecture presentations are free and open to the public.

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