

PAIN: *The Sleep Thief*

If you live with pain, you know that sometimes your only relief is when you are asleep. However, some people's pain prevents them from finding a way to become comfortable — oftentimes leading to the development of sleep problems. These problems not only result in overtiredness, but may cause pain to worsen.

Here are a few conditions that may trigger a sleep problem to develop:

- Anxiety and depression can make it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep. Consequent sleep loss can lead to increased pain. Anxiety and depression may also increase a person's sensitivity to pain.
- Some breathing related sleep disorders like sleep apnea are associated with obesity — and obesity is also linked with back pain. People with chronic pain may have trouble exercising. Lack of exercise leads to weight gain. Excess weight then restricts exercise, which leads to more pounds gained. This vicious cycle can lead to sleep apnea, which prevents a restful night's sleep.
- Limb movement disorders, such as restless legs syndrome, might disrupt the normal sleep pattern.
- Fibromyalgia can cause pain throughout the body. It is also linked with fatigue, anxiety and sleep problems.
- Many prescription medications can impair the quality of your sleep. For instance, medications for conditions such as high blood pressure, epilepsy and ADHD may cause sleep problems.
- Pain medications interrupt sleep. Unfortunately, some medications prescribed for pain, such as codeine and morphine, can cause insomnia. These opioid pain medications can cause apnea, brief pauses in breathing, during sleep. Therefore, people who take these kinds of medications are at a higher risk for sleep problems.

Some of the ways pain causes sleep problems include the following:

Pain is a sensation you feel when nerves are stimulated to an intense degree. This stimulation activates the brain, which keeps you awake.

Pain at night disrupts sleep architecture. You need a certain amount of each stage of sleep to feel rested and for proper memory. These stages include light sleep, deep sleep, and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. We normally go through four to six cycles of these stages per night. But if pain wakes you up, you spend too much time in light sleep. This reduced sleep — in particular, shortened REM — may increase sensitivity to pain. Sleep deprivation makes you more sensitive to pain.

A study showed that normal, healthy individuals are more sensitive to pain when they are low on rest. The reason is that sleep deprivation causes increased production of inflammatory chemicals in the body called cytokines.

Pain worsens sleep patterns and sleep disturbances worsen pain—it's a vicious cycle.

Managing pain that steals your sleep

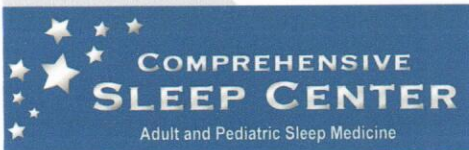
- The first step is to reduce the pain. Pain control reduces anxiety and depression, improves sleep, and makes for better overall quality of life. Calm yourself with meditation and other relaxation techniques.
- Gentle massage is also beneficial for both insomnia and chronic pain
- Exercise the right way. Regular exercise can improve both pain and sleep issues. However, activity within three hours

of bedtime can keep you up, so the earlier in the day you work out, the better. For pain, the best exercise is moderate and low-impact. Try walking, yoga, or swimming.

- Forgo daytime naps or limit yourself to a brief 10- to 20-minute nap in the afternoon.
- Take a warm bath or shower before bed to wind down.
- Lull yourself to sleep with relaxation CDs that play a babbling brook, gentle waves, or other soothing sounds.
- Remove all light-producing appliances from your bedroom, including the TV; if you must have them, choose ones that emit red rather than blue light.
- Abstain from alcohol in the evening; it may help you fall asleep, but the effects of a cocktail quickly backfire, disrupting sleep cycles a few hours into the night.
- Run a fan or other non-specific white noise machine in your bedroom to dampen street or other sounds.
- Avoid caffeine, which disrupts sleep patterns; if you need a caffeine boost, enjoy it before noon.
- Do not exercise or eat within three hours of going to bed.

If pain is preventing you from getting a good night sleep, it's time to see a doctor. People with pain and sleep problems should undergo a diagnostic sleep study.

Sleep problems should be discussed with your doctor to ensure there are no underlying problems that need to be addressed. You can also schedule your appointment with Dr. Oktai Mamedov at Comprehensive Sleep Center. He is Board certified in Sleep Medicine and Internal Medicine. Call today to schedule your consultation at 517-755-6888.



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