6 Tips to Improve Your Sleep With RA

by LANA BARHUM

How to Sleep Better With RA

About 70% of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients have trouble sleeping, and considering the relationship between pain and sleep quality, it is not surprising that people struggle so much. After all, sore, inflamed joints are distracting, and a lack of sleep heightens RA discomforts. Here are some tips that can help you sleep better with RA.

How to Sleep Well With Rheumatoid Arthritis

If RA is keeping you up at night, there are ways you can still get better quality sleep at night.

1. Ensure You Have Comfortable Bedding

From the type of mattress you lie on, to the sheets and pillows you use, it can all make or break your sleep. If you struggle with body temperature regulation and night sweats, then try silk pillowcases or sheets. A cheaper option that is still more comfy than cotton is satin.

If you are looking for a better-quality duvet or sheets, then we recommend Brooklinen. They have Classic Percale, which is a cotton option, but it is more comfortable than your typical cotton due to its 270-thread count. Sateen and French flax linen are also available too.

Another addition you can make is a percale cotton mattress pad, which goes on top of your mattress. This can create more support for your tired body and aching limbs.

2. Manage Your Stress Levels

According to one report, people with RA are twice to four times more likely than others in the general population to experience depression.

Depression not only affects disease activity, pain and coping techniques, but it also interferes with your sleep. Moreover, depression and worry keep you up at night.

Try setting aside some time each day to deal with stress so that worries don’t keep you up at night. Write feelings down or manage stressful emotions with yoga, exercise, relaxation breathing, meditation or by talking to a friend.

3. Manage Other Health Conditions

People with RA may have other health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, fibromyalgia, restless leg syndrome and sleep apnea; all of these conditions are common in people with RA. Having untreated and or undertreated health conditions can cause further sleep problems.

Talk to your doctor about treating all your health conditions and any problems you have with getting a good night's sleep. Sometimes, additional health issues may make it harder for you to sleep, and treating them may mean more rest for you.

4. Stick to a Sleep Schedule

Having the same sleep and wake up times is good advice for everyone, but it is more important for people with RA. Don't change your sleep times and don't sleep in, because changing your sleep times can upset your body's internal clock.

5. Get Regular Activity

One 2011 study reported in the Journal of Aging Research found that exercise can improve symptoms of joint pain, stiffness and fatigue in people with arthritis. It also promotes psychological well-being and helps with sleep and relaxation.

Any and all types of exercise are beneficial. RA pain and fatigue can make it harder to be active, so do what you can to keep moving.

6. Talk to Your Doctor

If your pain is what is keeping you up at night, it might be time to talk to your doctor about better managing your pain. Your treatments can be adjusted for better symptom relief, including pain and inflammation, which eventually leads to getting better sleep.

Your doctor can prescribe a low dose type of antidepressant, such as amitriptyline, to help you sleep better. Other medications, such as muscle relaxers and prescription sleep aids, may also help with sleep.

My Personal RA-Friendly Bedtime Practices

Having RA going on 10 years, I have my own bedtime practice ideas for getting better quality sleep at night. Here are some bedtime practices that help me to sleep better at night:

- **Take a warm bath or shower before bed.** I find a hot shower instantly relaxes my joints and muscles and helps me fall asleep faster.
- **Invest in a heated mattress pad.** An electric blanket or a heated water bed are also good alternative heat options.
- **Sleep on an orthopedic-type mattress.** Try to get a mattress that is as comfortable as possible. If a new mattress isn't in your budget right now, try an orthopedic mattress topper.
- **Keep distractions out of the bedroom.** This includes no electronics. Make sure your bedroom is for sleep only, and not for reading, watching TV or using other electronic devices.
- **Slip a pillow under your knees.** This is used to raise my legs and alleviate pressure off my joints. A whole-body pillow can also help for positioning joints and make sleep more comfortable and less painful.
- **Binaural beats.** I have utilized binaural beats for sleep. Binaural beats send signal frequencies to the ears through your headphones that put your brain into sleep mode and promote deep sleep. You can find binaural beats videos on YouTube.

The Importance of Sleep

People who have poor sleep may not achieve the deepest sleep phases, which are important for releasing hormones that repair the damage done to our bodies during the day. Moreover, a lack of good-quality sleep means our bodies do not get all the feel-good hormones they need for managing and regulating pain.

The Takeaway

Sleep and rest are the best ways to repair your body, and RA patients need good-quality sleep to manage debilitating pain and fatigue. Sometimes, getting restful sleep is difficult and you may need to find creative ways to sleep better.

If the ideas above do not help you to get the sleep you desperately need, it is time to talk to your doctor. Medication and additional therapies may help to keep pain and inflammation down, manage symptoms of depression or anxiety and help you sleep better.

By managing and addressing sleep problems, your RA symptoms and pain can be significantly reduced.