

A therapy for baby boomers to sleep on

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If you're over 55 and have spent more than a few sleepless nights, you're not alone -- insomnia affects about half of all people over 55 -- but you may also be at increased risk for physical and mental ailments.

Many older adults don't get enough restorative sleep, leading to serious health concerns, including cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, memory problems and increased rates of depression. Unfortunately, current sleeping pills are associated with memory problems, a risk for falls, dependency, withdrawal symptoms and disturbed sleeping patterns.

Circadin, a new drug developed at Tel Aviv University by Prof. Nava Zisapel, a chemist and neurobiologist from TAU's George S. Wise Faculty of Life Sciences, may help America's aging baby boomers get the much-needed sleep they need. Recent results from Prof. Zisapel's research with Circadin appear in the *Journal of Sleep Research* and are reviewed in *Aging Health*.

How the Body Tells Time

Prof. Zisapel's research centers on the hormone melatonin, which affects the way our biological functions differentiate between day and night.

"As we age, the melatonin hormone signal weakens," says Prof. Zisapel.

"As a result, our bodies and brains feel less difference between day and night."

Exacerbating the effect of low melatonin levels, aging people tend to sleep in a less organized fashion than younger people, Prof. Zisapel

explains. "People are sleeping in front of the TV, or nodding off during conversations, and taking long afternoon naps. This leads to less sleep at night. In a way, their sleep habits become more like babies', and less like those of healthy adults who sleep in consolidated periods during the night."

Mimicking the profile of nighttime melatonin found in our bodies, Circadin replenishes the much-needed hormone, which declines steadily with age. Clinical trials in the United States and Europe found that Circadin improves sleep quality and morning alertness, and helps those 55 and over get a better night's sleep.

Her new drug therapy "improves sleep and daytime vigilance, helping to re-organize the circadian system, the body's internal clock," Prof. Zisapel says. Added benefits include more normalized blood pressure and blood sugar levels at night. The formulation also has a profound effect on the blind, whose biological clock is disturbed because they can't see light, a trigger for synchronizing with the external day/night cycle.

Advice for Sound Sleep Hygiene

Until Circadin is available in the United States, there are some simple steps seniors can take to get a good night's sleep, Prof. Zisapel says. Spending a couple of hours outdoors every day can help. Sipping lattes on a cafe patio (away from direct sunlight) can be pleasurable, and increases the exposure to natural light from the blue-green spectrum. Experiencing a full spectrum of light during the day could also be beneficial, as is routine exercise and avoiding daytime naps and sleeping in front of the TV.

Source: American Friends of Tel Aviv University

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