Why sleep changes in your 50s

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they age or find themselves waking more frequently throughout the night.

Compounding these biological changes is the reality that the habits of younger decades no longer work in quite the same way. A late-afternoon coffee that once provided nothing more than an energy boost may now push bedtime back by hours. That evening glass of wine, long considered a soothing nightcap, can interfere with the deeper stages of sleep, thus leaving the body tired despite eight hours in bed. Even the environment of the bedroom itself takes on new importance. Where warmth once felt comforting, it can now trigger discomfort as the body becomes more sensitive to fluctuations in temperature.

How to get better sleep

The encouraging news is that sleep in your 50s can still be deeply restorative. According to Paul Kaloostian, M.D., a California-based neurosurgeon, one of the most effective ways to support healthy rest is by getting as much natural sunlight as possible, particularly in the morning.

As people get older, they often spend less time outdoors, yet exposure to natural light helps regulate the body's circadian rhythm—the internal clock that governs when you feel alert and when you feel drowsy. Over time, however, people tend to spend less time outdoors, limiting this natural signal. By stepping outside for a morning walk or simply letting daylight flood into your home, you help set the stage for better sleep later on.

Stress management also plays a crucial role. Chronic stress triggers the release of hormones that keep the body alert, making it harder to fall and stay asleep. Finding ways to soften daily tension, maybe through mindfulness practices, gentle exercise, journaling, or even small rituals of self-care, can calm the nervous system and prepare the mind for rest.

Consistency is another quiet but powerful ally. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day strengthens your internal rhythm, making it easier to slip into sleep and wake feeling refreshed. Pairing this with an evening ritual such as reading, stretching, or dimming the lights creates a gentle cue that the day is drawing to a close.

It also helps to be mindful of screens and stimulants. The blue light from phones and tablets can suppress melatonin, while caffeine and alcohol in the evening can fragment sleep or make it harder to drift off. Swapping late-night scrolling for calming activities, choosing lighter dinners, and limiting stimulants can make a meaningful difference.

Equally important is the environment itself. The bedroom should be a sanctuary for rest, cool and quiet, with supportive bedding that invites relaxation. Simple adjustments like lavender scents, blackout curtains, or white noise can transform the quality of sleep in surprising ways.

A daily reset

In many ways, this stage of life invites a new perspective on sleep. Rather than chasing the patterns of your 30s or 40s, it becomes about embracing what your body now asks for and responding with care. Sleep is no longer a passive act but an intentional practice, one that supports memory, mood, and vitality.

Approached with this mindset, the 50s can be a time, not of sleepless nights, but of restorative rest that fuels the energy, clarity, and joy needed for the years ahead. After all, sleep in your 50s isn't a luxury—it's a daily reset that keeps the body resilient and the mind clear.

And while these changes are often felt most keenly in your 50s, the habits that nurture sleep are not bound to any age group. Sunlight, routine, stress management, mindful eating, and a soothing environment can benefit everyone. The earlier these practices are woven into daily life, the more resilient your sleep and overall health can become in the years to come.