

The Allergy & Asthma Clinic

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How Poorly Controlled Allergies Can Affect Our Sleep



It is a known fact that poorly controlled allergies can affect the outcome of recuperative sleep. Allergy symptoms that can affect a good night's sleep include persistent nasal congestion, post nasal drip, cough, chest tightness, wheezing, shortness of breath and generalized itching, hives and skin rashes.

Let's face it, if your nose is congested, or mucus is constantly dripping down the back of your throat, sleep can be disrupted, leading a myriad of subsequent problems, including daytime sleepiness, fatigue and even cognitive impairment. Nasal allergies are directly linked to nasal congestion, but fortunately, there are effective treatments available, both OTC and prescription, which can help provide relief.

Cough, chest tightness, wheezing and shortness of breath can also contribute to poor sleep. As with persistent nasal symptoms, many who experience chest symptoms have an underlying environmental allergy, which may sometimes lead to asthma. In May of 2020, an article in *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, the scientific journal of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) cited that "too little sleep, and occasionally too much sleep, can negatively impact adults with asthma". If asthma has been diagnosed, it is important to coordinate care with an allergist to keep the underlying allergies under optimum control and to start treatment to help reduce airway inflammation.

Itching, skin rashes and hives are notorious for keeping people up at night. Both adults and children often report poor sleep as a result of persistent itching and discomfort. Treatment for skin conditions include addressing the underlying allergy, using hypoallergenic products, aggressive use of moisturizers and periodic use of topical creams and ointments.

Allergy Medications and how they can affect sleep

When the clinical decision is made to start a medication, one of the biggest concerns is to weigh the potential benefits of the medication versus the potential for an adverse reaction. Although most allergy and asthma medications are generally safe, some can be associated with side effects, which can further aggravate a sleepless night.

Antihistamines: Non-sedating antihistamines such as Allegra and Claritin are associated with very few side effects and can often help with nasal allergy symptoms. While Zyrtec and Xyzal have a higher incidence of causing sedation, these medications are also considered generally safe to take for allergic conditions. Zyrtec and Xyzal have also been shown to be quite effective in relieving itching.

Sedating antihistamines, such as Benadryl, which can be effective for some, have a much higher incidence of causing sedation and caution must be taken if sedating antihistamines are taken on a regular basis. In fact, these medications have been shown to cause cognitive impairment in some patients and studies have shown that there may be a link between prolonged use of sedating, 1st generation antihistamines (such as Benadryl) and increased risk of developing Alzheimer's.

Decongestants, which contain stimulants, should not be taken at night.

Anti-inflammatory Nasal and Lung Sprays: These medications are usually prescribed for allergic rhinitis and lower respiratory conditions. While they do contain "steroids", absorption of the active ingredient is directed into the nasal or respiratory passageways, unlike systemic steroids, which have the potential to cause numerous side effects, including sleep disturbances.

We all deserve a good night's rest. Keeping your underlying allergies under the best control can help you achieve that goal! If allergies or asthma are disrupting your sleep, please contact us. We are here to help.