MS and Sleep

by ABIGAIL BUDD

MS and Sleep Problems

Insomnia is a new and frustrating MS symptom for me. I've never had any problems before but just lately I'm having trouble getting a good, restful night's sleep.

Often in the afternoons I hit a wall and fatigue descends like a fog around me. I was at work the other day and felt an irresistible urge to put my head on my desk and sleep. I pushed through it and carried on but inside I was counting the hours till bedtime. I had loads of stuff to do between work and bedtime so by the time I went to bed I was sure I'd drift off easily and feel great in the morning.

Wrong! I closed my eyes gratefully and snuggled down but my body had forgotten to tell my brain I was exhausted! It was like it was pinging around in my head, thinking and running away with itself all on its own! I put up with this for hours (the last time I looked at the clock it was 2.15 a.m.) but eventually fell asleep.

At 3.30 I woke up again with the same mental gymnastics going on. I got up and went to the bathroom and eventually fell asleep again a few hours later. When the alarm dragged me out of oblivion at 6.45 I felt like I'd been out dancing all night! I got through work in a daze of exhaustion and the same thing happened the following night.

So what's going on and what can I do?

Causes of Sleep Problems

According to Web MD, sleep problems are common in people with MS, but often aren't directly caused by the disease. Factors like stress, depression, anxiety and spasticity and inactivity can cause sleep difficulties. It is, however, possible for lesions in the brain to cause problems with getting your Zs as well.

I've certainly been under stress lately, starting a new job and going to London to attend an MS Brain Health Advisory board meeting must be taking its toll. I suffer with MS spasticity, too, but don't take the prescribed Baclofen for it as the side effects include muscle weakness and fatigue, both symptoms I could do without!

Spasticity only really affects me in the morning though, and usually sorts itself out by lunch time. I'm not inactive these days and don't allow myself to suffer depression but can see how these things can affect MSers.

Next page: tips for getting a good night's sleep.

Get a Good Night's Sleep

There is a number things MSers can do to try to improve sleep, and one of them is a consistent bedtime routine. I

always go to bed at 10.00 and read till 11.30 so I'm ready for sleep, but sometimes this isn't enough as my brain is still buzzing. Other tips include:

- **Avoid sleep during the day.** Easier said than done, but long naps will impact on how well you sleep at night.
- **Reduce caffeine.** If I drink coffee after lunch time I'm awake for hours, so I drink green tea during the day and peppermint or camomile tea in the evenings.
- **Reduce alcohol.** I had one glass last night and slept brilliantly, but more than that keeps me awake and forces me to get up for the bathroom in the middle of the night! And drinking alcohol with MS often isn't the best idea anyway.
- **Reduce fluid intake in the evenings.** I have one cup of camomile tea in the evenings but more than this causes me to get up in the night. Make sure you drink plenty of water during the day though as dehydration can add to fatigue and causes other problems.
- **Exercise regularly.** This is a hard one when mobility is an issue, and it's constantly on my “to do” list. I'm much more active since starting my new job but need to factor in more exercise. I am going to start keep fit classes at my local MS treatment centre as soon as I can and will no doubt blog about that when I get round to it!
- **Don't look at the clock.** Tossing and turning and worrying about the time can increase stress and keep you awake. I usually get my kindle out and read a few more chapters if I can't sleep and this usually works.

- **Avoid TV and gadgets.** I've read that playing on a mobile phone can stimulate the brain so avoid looking at it in the evenings.
- **Get comfortable.** Wear comfortable nightclothes to bed, make sure your pillows and mattress are to your liking and make sure the temperature in the room is not too warm, but not too cold either.

One thing I want to avoid is resorting to medication. Whenever I've had sleeping tablets in the past they always make me feel groggy and tired the next day, which defeats the object of getting a good nights sleep! I don't like the idea of being dependant on medication for anything so natural solutions are better for me.

If making the above changes don't work for you see your doctor and get a referral to a sleep specialist to investigate the underlying causes.