

The Thurston-Mason Senior News

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The Family Caregiver

Sleep



Sleep . . . oh, wonderful sleep. Like watching an infant slumber, warm and safe in their mother's arms. Or that sleep you get when your mother-in-law takes the kids for the night. When it comes to sleep and caring for another, it is always about THEIR sleep and YOUR sleep. Both Matter. If THEIR sleep is interrupted, inconsistent and non-existent; so might be yours. If YOUR sleep is interrupted, inconsistent or non-existent – you will have less patience and humor and less to give.

Before we talk about sleep in general, how about the often asked question “is it OK to let folks with dementia nap during the day?” Our answer is maybe. If the nap keeps them up at night, perhaps not. But if it restores and relaxes them, why not? (Napping and sleep cycles are very individual and may take another article.)

Another sleep question we are asked is “When should we wake someone with dementia, who

has been sleeping all night or a long afternoon nap?” Waking up is challenging for a brain with dementia (or many of us until we have a cup of coffee). Whether the brain has been asleep for a 30-minute nap or 12 hours overnight, it takes time and energy for the brain to wake up.

In general, if the person with dementia is sleeping, let them. The brain repairs itself during sleep, even brains with dementia. If someone sleeps 8, 10 or 12 hours, let them. They may sleep longer because of boredom, fatigue or because they do not know what to do. But the rest does their brain and body good.

Waking up is a process for all of us and a real challenge for someone with dementia. Waking up can take a while, to figure out where they are, who you are and what is happening now. So when someone wakes from a long sleep or even a nap, help them get

oriented. Orienting someone is the key to getting them back to here and now, and before they get out of bed or have breakfast. Some caregivers have wake-up routines such as holding hands and softly saying their name. Others sing a wake up song to help them back from dreamland.

If the bathroom visit is not urgent, a snack is next. Yes a snack may be necessary even before breakfast, especially after a long night's sleep. Their brain needs fuel to get out of bed and to the toilet. Offering a snack before any activity is a good general practice. If they like to watch TV for a few hours before showering, they may need a bit of food to give their brain a boost. Offering food before an activity may be the best chance of helping them help you to provide care.

This article is a service of the Lewis Mason Thurston Area Agency on Aging. For more information about the Family Caregiver Support Program, call (360) 664-2168 and ask to speak with a Resource Manager or visit our website at WWW.LMTAAA.ORG