

ABOUT FATIGUE, SLEEP PROBLEMS, SLEEPING POSITION AND APPS TO SLEEP BETTER

Fatigue

People with ALS are generally tired faster than healthy people. They have weakened muscles without any reserve. That means muscles are less effective in maintaining a force or muscle contraction, what we consider real 'fatigue'. Typically, when you produce power from a muscle, you increase the effect by stimulating the nerve cells. This natural process is counteracted with ALS because you have fewer neurons, and so you'll have problems to generate the power you want or need. Muscles will get tired faster in their attempt to perform a common task. In fact, we all have a physical limit. For people with ALS that limit comes earlier after they developed the disease.

Some pharmaceutical companies investigate the effects of muscle weakness and muscle loss, fatigue and loss of mobility. One company, the San Francisco based Cytokinetics, test a drug that could improve muscle function in disorders such as ALS. The company reported encouraging results from Phase II clinical trials of the drug, CK-2017357 (now renamed as "Tirasemtiv").

Despite the fact that this kind of drug doesn't address the cause of ALS, it still may be able to help muscles to work for a longer period before they get exhausted. And that would significantly increase the quality of life for people with ALS.

Sleeping problems

ALS patients may be confronted sooner or later with all kinds of sleeping problems and inconveniences small or big. Here are some tips on common sleep problems.

Do you have the feeling you need to go to the toilet but then turns out that you don't really go? This may indicate inflammation of the urinary tract, because it gives the typical symptom that one wants to urinate frequently, often with a sense of urgency. Your doctor can easily detect by examining a sample of your urine.

Another common problem is an 'overactive bladder'. This can be caused by muscle spasm. If that is the case, your doctor may prescribe the necessary medication, called anticholinergics. These medications can reduce bladder spasms and also help abundant saliva production, a common problem for people with ALS. This is because a side effect of anticholinergic medication reduces the production of saliva. Excess salivation can be very difficult, especially if you already have difficulty swallowing.

If you suffer from nocturnal muscle cramps or of restless legs syndrome also consult your doctor. Because there are medicines and treatments.

ALS patients develop in some cases, breathing problems that are related to the weakness of the respiratory muscles. Taking sleeping medication can even aggravate this condition. This is because when one sleeps better, it becomes harder to breathe deeply. Then waking up when the amount of oxygen in the blood falls below the level necessary for a proper circulation of oxygen in the body. When this is the case, one can benefit from a lung function test, or by a nocturnal sleep research, this to investigate better the condition. Your doctor can then make sure that you get a non-invasive ventilation (Bi-Pap). This is a breathing pressurized system with a device that takes over part of the work of her breathing at night using a plastic mask over the nose and mouth.

What is the best sleeping position

Three-quarters of Belgians sleep in side-lying, supine 20% and the remaining 5% is within the abdomen. The attitude how you fall asleep, is not necessarily the one you keep most of the night. People usually automatically take the position that gives them less inconvenience as possible. For specific symptoms a correct sleep position can help.

With a proper sleeping position, it is important that the spine viewed from the side is located in its natural position. The slight curve should be retained.

LATERAL POSITION

The fetal position

This is the side-lying position with arms in sleep direction and legs pulled up to his chest. A pillow under the knee charged the back the least. This position is good against low back pain, stress and sleep apnea, but bad for neck and headaches. When neck pain, it is certainly important to ensure that the neck and through the thoracic vertebrae are in a smooth line. If not the neck pain may worsen and going further to the back and the head. So use a pillow that provides good support and avoid folding a pillow which is too low.

The spoon position

This is the fetal position, but then in the arms of the partner, who lies in the same position in front or behind you. This position is good against stress, back pain and sleep apnea but bad for back, neck and shoulder pain.

The recovery position

This is the side-lying position with the arms in the direction of the body and the legs bent slightly. This posture is good for indigestion, stomach problems and acid reflux and also good for people with back problems. Please take attention that mattress and pillow support the body in a good way. The spine should form a straight line lying on your side when sleeping.

The custom side-lying position, or three-quarters

This attitude is when you're halfway in between abdominal and side-lying, with a raised upper leg or arm. However a pure side-lying position is better, especially if you have back pain because otherwise rotation occurs in the neck and back. Often, such an attitude is provoked by a mattress too hard, where the shoulders and pelvis sink not deep enough into. The side-lying position with one arm behind the back is not recommended. This is unnatural and has a worse blood flow as result.

SUPINE

Supine body is pretty well supported and the weight is distributed over the largest possible surface. Low back pain can also be caused by too little support. In order to maintain the lumbar curve, you can lay a pillow or a towel in the lumbar. Also, you can sleep with bent knees or put a cushion in the knee.

This position is good for joint pain and arthritis because the weight of the body is distributed evenly. However, this position is only good if you have an adjusted mattress that provides extra support to the ankles, shoulders and back. Avoid your neck folds too strong by using a pillow that is not too large. This position is bad for snoring, sleep apnea and heart. Because the head is laying back, you go snoring faster and develop sleep apnea. Back sleepers best use a thin pillow for some support in the neck.

PRONE

In this position you lie flat on the stomach with the arms beside the body and legs outstretched. This posture is good for snoring but bad for back and neck. The strong curvature of the lower back tax the back joints too much. A pillow under your belly can help. Also the spine in the neck is heavily burdened by the strong lateral rotation of the head. Many belly sleepers therefore sleep without a pillow. To relieve neck rotation, you can place a pillow under the shoulder and chest at the height of the side to which the head is turned.

Mobile apps to help you sleep better

For people who have difficulty falling asleep or are facing

sleeping problems, software vendors have developed all kinds of mobile apps. Mobile apps are "applications" for smartphones that perform other functions than making a phone call. A mobile app or simply app is a software application designed to run on a smartphone, tablet or other electronic hand-held device. Using apps, it's possible to add simply additional features to a mobile device so that it can be extended to multi-purpose communication devices. Apps are created to make it easier for the user. They can be used, for example, to view information quickly. Content apps may vary from sports, weather, or news applications to applications related to internet banking, entertainment, books, photography, cooking, music, lifestyle, education, route navigation etc.

Meanwhile, there is also a variety of free and low-cost 'sleep apps for iPhones and Android available on the iTunes and Google Play app stores. These apps, designed to help you sleep, are divided into two categories: those provide sounds or noises that help you relax and guiding to sleep and those who have a recording function for you (and perhaps your doctor) to help you to form an idea which sleep problems you're struggling with.

Just find the name of the app in the right online store, depending on whether you have an iPhone or an Android iTunes.com Google Play.

iPhone:

Perfect Sleep (free): A Guide to learn to meditate. Designed to provide a deeper more restful sleep satisfaction.

Sleep Cycle Alarm Clock: Wakes you during your last deep sleep phase, so you're less likely to feel drowsy or tired.

DS Counting Sheep (free): Difficult to fall asleep? Here is a tool that can make it easier to count sheep.

Relax Timer (free): Just Put your cell phone next or under your pillow and it will track your sleep, so you get a better idea of whether you get the rest you need.

Sleep as Android (free for a test of two weeks): Provides a graph of your sleep history, details about your sleep deficit and stats about your deep sleep. It even allows you to share the information on Facebook and Twitter if you want.

With these sleep tips we hope you will have a good sleep.

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