

## 2013 February Newsletter Article by Ferris Fletcher

### Event Review: Women and Sleep Seminar

“Shh . . . I’m Sleeping or at Least trying to: An Evening about Sleep and Mid Life Women” was a wonderful presentation by Jan B. Swanson, PsyD, LP from the Mayo Women’s Health Clinic on November 8, 2012. Dr. Swanson explained that if we have healthy sleep, we do not feel sleepy in the daytime. 50% of American adults, especially women, report sleep difficulties. Dr. Swanson outlined some of the reasons that these problems develop. As we age, the hippocampus area of the brain, which is the sleep center, is 3% less active. Women have a neck muscle that is vulnerable to reductions in progesterone, so post-menopausal women have more sleep apnea. Hormonal changes in menopause which increase anxiousness and hot flashes, stress, light changes in winter, chronic health problems like inflammation, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and excess calories with undernourishment, can all reduce the quality and quantity of sleep.

We may also have high expectations of sleeping through the night, which are different from our ancestors, who may have expected to sleep four hours, be awake an hour, and then sleep again for some time. In fact, Dr. Swanson said that we can tolerate periodic nights of sleeplessness. She encouraged a perspective that emphasizes acceptance of night consciousness, which, in a yoga perspective, means that deep sleep connects us to our deep self.

We are more likely to sleep when we are cool and melatonin takes over. Therefore, we need to exercise to burn energy during the day, and avoid hyperaroused minds before we sleep. She cautioned against continuous medication, except possibly for people with childhood trauma histories, depression, or with restless leg syndrome. Instead, a slice of turkey at night and disconnection from electronic gadgets an hour before sleep were suggested. She reported that there are pajamas (cooljams) that cool you, and therefore allow sleepiness.

Many thanks to Dr. Swanson for sharing her knowledge, and to Ruth Markowitz for arranging the seminar for MWP members.

submitted by Ferris Fletcher