

## **SLEEP DISORDERS** 17.03.2013

Well this is a problem that is close to my heart, because for most of my life I have had problems sleeping. Many nights I have watched with envy as my husband goes to bed and I see him literally fall asleep before his head hits the pillow. I'm sure there are many of you reading this thinking "Yep me too!"

In this column, I'm going to explore some of the causes of poor sleep, why sleep is so important and what you can do to help the situation.

One of the many things we need to consider when looking at this scenario is that what we do in the day can affect our sleep pattern, a highly stressful day can make our bodies produce too much cortisol. This is a hormone usually produced early in the morning to wake us up, however if you are very stressed you may continue to produce cortisol as the day goes on and consequently, this can affect your sleep pattern. On the other side of the coin, anxiety and emotional problems etc can be due to or the cause of abnormal sleep patterns. If we look back to a time before man invented the electric light, people generally went to bed with nightfall and got up with the rising of the sun, but as the world has progressed and the electric light and all the stimulus around us has come into play the natural sleep pattern has been altered. Another problem today which can effect sleep is that a lot of us are not grounded, this may sound a bit strange,

but for those that are interested there are books on earthing available and I happen to know of individuals that have found the techniques remarkably successful.

There are several stages of sleep such as **Beta** which is the drowsy stage, then **theta**, which is when the heart rate slows and the body temperature drops, this is the point when the body prepares to enter deep sleep, **Delta** is the deep sleep stage and is generally when the body makes repairs to aid physical and mental regeneration. It is when the body recovers from the day, for example as we go through a busy day our brains heat up and while we sleep the brain cools down. Sleep walking and sleep talking usually occur in the delta state and we tend to go through **delta** sleep in the early part of the night, so if you go to bed at 10 o'clock, from 10pm till 2am is when you would go into the deep sleep stage, a lot of people don't go down to Delta sleep and they tend to age faster. **Rem sleep** is the last cycle of sleep and it is when most of your dreaming occurs, rapid eye movement, along with twitches in the muscles of the face and the extremities are all normal signs of Rem sleep patterns. It's when bed wetting occurs, the dreams are usually vivid, visual and often illogical i.e. nightmares often occur in REM sleep.

For an average good nights sleep an adult person should have 7 hours sleep, however as we get older the sleep patterns change and we tend to have less Delta sleep so our tissues don't recover as well, that's why young people

recover faster. Remember healing occurs when you are asleep, and by the way, dozing isn't sleeping.

### Common factors that affect sleep.

Raised histamine levels may keep you awake, histamine is an inhibitory Neurotransmitter it dilates blood vessels and is often elevated in relation to allergies i.e. hives etc. Sleep disorders are common with breathing problems for example snoring or sinus congestion and restless legs are also a common problem with sleep disorders, insomnia also tends to be more common in women.

Other common causes of insomnia are caffeine consumption, jet lag, and the use of certain medication, including many antidepressants, anti-seizure medication, most appetite suppressants and decongestants found in many cold and allergy remedies. A small amount of alcohol can help induce sleep initially, but it invariably disrupts deeper sleep cycles later. Tobacco, while smoking may seem to have a calming effect, nicotine is actually a neuro-stimulant and can cause sleep problems. Also a lack of certain nutrients such as calcium and magnesium can cause you to wake up after a few hours and not be able to return to sleep.

What can you do to help? Meditation tapes can really help reduce stress levels and stop the mind from racing. Learning to meditate can be life changing and if you suffer with a sleep disorder, you may even find it very beneficial to join a meditation group and learn techniques that really suit you. Tai

Chi and Chi Kung are traditional Chinese techniques or exercises that can assist in healing and can help relax and centre the body, which in turn can help you sleep better.

Try not to go to bed hungry, because the body needs the fuel to sleep and hunger can wake you up during the night. It is important to ensure that you sleep in a darkened, noise-free environment and that the bed is comfortable. Go to bed when you are sleepy and try to use the bedroom only for sleep, not for working, eating, or watching television, also try not to nap during the day, work on computers late of the evening and not to exercise right before bedtime, it's much better to exercise in the day up till early evening.

There are many beautiful herbs which can be really helpful for better sleep patterns and may be taken throughout the day to prevent a buildup of tension or mental excitability which might result in insomnia. An additional dose is subsequently recommended around one hour before bed. Key herbs include Ziyphus, Hops, Passion flower, Kava, Californian Poppy and Chamomile. Valerian is also effective for some and works best with continuous use for at least two weeks. Also melatonin which is a neuro-hormone, may alleviate delayed sleep, individuals may fall asleep earlier and awaken feeling less drowsy and more refreshed when using supplemental Melatonin. I for one have found it life changing however because we are so unique remember what works for one doesn't necessarily work for everyone. Lastly playing

soothing music and burning essential oils such as lavender around the home can help create a relaxing environment to help you wind down from a stressful day.

If you do have a problem it would be a good idea to see a qualified practitioner so they can look at the whole picture and treat you as the unique being that you truly are.

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