

SLEEP(LESSNESS)

Sleep is a vital need affecting many aspects of our daily lives, physical and psychological health. Sleep is an active and cyclical period that has stages within itself. A sleep period is normally composed of a Rapid Eye Movement (REM) and four Non-Rapid Eye Movement (non-REM) stages. Non-REM period is composed of two phases as drowsy sleep (first and second stages) and deep sleep (third and fourth stages) periods. Drowsy sleep is a transition from wakefulness to sleep. During deep sleep, there is no eye and muscle movement and it is very difficult to wake one up. REM stage includes dreaming, irregular breathing, rapid eye movements and heart beats. A full cycle of sleep stages takes 90-110 minutes and this cycle is repeated until awakening.

Deep sleep enables the secretion of the growth hormone in children and adolescents. Moreover, sleep is a vital need for the regulation of the functions of the neural system, such as memory, and physical well-being. A person's need for sleep may change depending on the developmental stages, environmental factors and individual differences. Each person has a unique biological clock and it should be considered in identifying a sleep problem for a particular person. Still, it should be noted that average sleep need for adults is 7-8 hours.

Sleep Disorders

Many people may have a sleep problem at least once during their lifetime. In university years, especially during the examination periods you may have sleepless study nights and thus, your sleep cycle may be disturbed. However, if these problems persist and interfere with your daily functioning, it is important to take notice. These problems may lead to increased vulnerability to illnesses by deteriorating psychological and physiological immune systems, increase in accidents and decrease in life quality as related to low energy, and difficulties with concentration and memory, and in the most deteriorated states, it may lead to death. You may see the most frequently experienced sleep problems below:

Sleeplessness (insomnia): It can be defined as a difficulty in falling asleep and/or maintaining sleep. If you are sleepless at least three times in a week for more than a month you may have chronic insomnia. You may not feel rested after the sleep due to inadequate and insufficient deep sleep. Some physical illnesses, psychological problems, stress, poor diets, travelling and many other factors may cause insomnia.

Excessive Sleepiness (hypersomnia): It is a feeling of excessive need for sleep that influences daily functioning negatively. Hypersomnia can be defined as being excessively sleepy during the day or inability to maintain sleep during the night. Even if the individual gets enough sleep at night, and/or has some time to sleep during the day, s/he still feels a need for sleeping.

Narcolepsy: Narcolepsy is characterized by sleeping attacks during the day, even if the individual had enough sleep at night. These individuals may suddenly fall asleep at inappropriate times, such as when driving, listening to a lecture, or talking to people. Unlike to hypersomnia, sleepiness in narcolepsy is not a longstanding state instead, it is like a sudden attack and after the sleep the individual feels rested. It is generally inherited; however it can also be related to brain damages. It can be controlled by some medicines.

Sleep Apnea Syndrome: It is characterized by occasional pauses in breathing during sleep. It causes insufficient deep sleep and snoring. This disorder may result in nervousness, depression, hypertension, heart attacks and death. The individual does not feel rested after sleep and feels sleepy during the day.

Restless Leg Syndrome: It is the discomfort, unrest, numbness and prickle in legs during resting or sleeping accompanied by an irresistible urge to move them. It can be related to depression, anxiety, diabetes, iron deficiency, some drugs or menstruation periods.

Parasomnias: They are sudden and disruptive sleep-related events. They may be caused by disorders in central nervous system or psychological factors. **Night terror:** It is like a seizure that begins with abrupt screaming and crying, accompanied by increased heartbeat and breathing. **Talking in sleep and sleepwalking;** is a state where the individual may open his/her eyes, talk or walk around while sleeping. **Nightmares;** are frightening dreams that are probably based on psychological problems. **Incubus;** is the continuation of the paralysis of the body during REM, after waking up. **Teeth gnashing;** can be related to the transference of stress experienced during the daytime to the sleep, and/or unexpressed emotions. **REM behavior disorder;** is the continued activation of the muscles that are supposed to be relaxed during the sleep and the subsequent emergence of some movements accompanying the contents of dreams, like hitting and talking. This is a very serious problem due to the risk of harm to the sleeper or others.

For a healthier sleep!

- Determine your sleeping hours. Try to go to bed and wake up around the same time.
- Do not take late afternoon naps. If you have to take a nap during the day, try to do it 8 hours after you wake up and for 10-15 minutes.
- Stimuli like light, sound, and noises make falling asleep difficult. Try to eliminate these stimuli in the room you are sleeping. Keep the air in your bedroom fresh and maintain appropriate room temperature.
- Use the room you are sleeping in and your bed only for sleeping purposes. When you are unable to sleep, try to do relaxing activities. You should prefer to do the activities such as watching TV, listening to radio, reading book in a different room.
- It is important to be relaxed and comfortable before going to bed. For this reason, you can take a warm bath or can perform relaxation exercises (You can check the "Relaxation Techniques" brochure for some of the exercises that will help you relax).
- Do physical exercises regularly for 20-30 minutes everyday in order to reduce stress and to fall into deep sleep. However, because engaging in exercise stimulates the body and increases the body temperature, you may find it difficult to fall asleep immediately after exercising. Hence, prefer to exercise at least 5-6 hours before your sleep time.
- Try not to be extremely hungry or full when you are about to sleep. Try to eat easy-to-digest foods if you are getting hungry.
- Do not use sleep medication without consulting to a doctor.
- Do not consume stimulants such as coffee, coke, and chocolate close to the time you will sleep. You may prefer herbal teas instead.
- Do not smoke before sleep. Stimulant effect of nicotine may cause sleep disturbances.
- Because of the sedative effect of alcohol, it is thought to be a sleep facilitator. However, it interferes with the transition to REM sleep, which in turn disturbs the sleep cycle. So, try not to drink alcohol at around your sleep time. Moreover, alcohol that is used to facilitate falling asleep causes lack of sufficient deep sleep and has many serious negative effects in the long run.
- Stop studying at least one hour before sleep in order to relieve your mind.
- Express your recurrent feelings, which you find difficult to stop, by writing or sharing with friends. Do not think about them in bed.
- Avoid checking what time it is, when you have difficulty falling asleep. You can make some mental and physical relaxation exercises instead of forcing yourself to sleep.
- If you are having sleep-related problems for a long time and they markedly interfere with your daily functioning, and if the suggestions stated here do not help you to overcome them, you may consider getting help from a professional.

For More Information

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