

Sleep and Wellness

Having Trouble Sleeping?

If you have suffered from sleep disruption for a long time, you may have come to the realization that it is an inevitable part of your life, and sound sleep is something that others have, but not you. You don't need to accept this inevitability.

Sleep is essential for good health and wellbeing. It is also an important element in our attempts to successfully balance our obligations between our work and personal commitments.

Stress is a major cause of short term sleeping difficulties according to sleep experts. Common triggers include school- or job-related pressures, a family or marriage problem and a serious illness or death in the family. Usually the sleep problem disappears when the stressful situation passes. However, if short-term sleep problems such as insomnia aren't managed properly from the beginning, they can persist long after the original stress has passed and will have negative effect on both our physical and mental health.

We now know that almost all psychiatric disorders show some problems with sleep.' But scientists previously believed the psychiatric problems triggered the sleep issues. New research suggests the reverse is the case; that is, a lack of sleep is causing some psychological disturbances. Let's look at some other health issues.

Key Points

- Sleep problems are more likely to affect patients with psychiatric disorders than people in the general population.
- Sleep problems may increase risk for developing particular mental illnesses, as well as result from such disorders.
- Treating the sleep disorder may help alleviate symptoms of the mental health problem.
- Sleep problems also increase the risk of developing depression. Two longitudinal studies in young people — one involving 300 pairs of young twins, and another including 1,014 teenagers — found that sleep problems developed before major depression did.
- Longitudinal studies suggest that insomnia and other sleep problems worsen before an episode of mania or bipolar depression, and lack of sleep can trigger mania. Sleep problems also adversely affect mood and contribute to relapse.
- Insomnia may also be a risk factor for developing an anxiety disorder, but not as much as it is for major depression. In the longitudinal study of teenagers mentioned earlier, for example, sleep problems preceded anxiety disorders 27% of the time, while they preceded depression 69% of the time.
- A lack of sleep also increases the risk of diabetes, coronary problems, particularly blood pressure.

- There is also an increased risk of weight gain. Your body has to try and conserve energy where it can. A lack of sleep is a contributing factor to people putting on weight. The longer you are awake the more opportunity you have to comfort eat!
- Difficulty sleeping often leads people to drink more alcohol in the mistaken belief that it will assist in getting them to sleep. Reliance on alcohol and also other medications to assist in sleep can put people in danger of becoming dependent these substances.

What you can do to get a better night's sleep

Whatever the cause of our insomnia, there are some ways to manage it that involves only a few changes in lifestyle or environment. It is important to look at ways to improve your sleep, and there are various things that you can easily do yourself to try and improve the quality of your sleep. According to leading sleep researchers, there are techniques to combat common sleep problems:

- Keep a regular sleep/wake schedule
- Don't drink or eat caffeine four to six hours before bed and minimize daytime use
- Don't smoke, especially near bedtime or if you awake in the night
- Avoid alcohol and heavy meals before sleep
- Get regular exercise
- Minimize noise, light and excessive hot and cold temperatures where you sleep
- Develop a regular bed time and go to bed at the same time each night
- Try and wake up without an alarm clock

People put themselves in a position to worry more frequently, usually just before sleep time thus make them more anxious, depressed and disappointed in themselves, and of course, all this mental activity will keep you fully awake! So worrying is an 'attempt' at mentally 'solving problems' that haven't yet happened. And this keeps us awake doesn't it? While worrying can be seen as problem-solving, we end up focusing on unhelpful strategies and in the long term, these strategies actually keep worrying going, making such strategies "unhelpful", breaking the thought process and anxiety over sleep is the goal.

For more information on how to deal with worrying visit http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax.cfm?Info_ID=46 and click on the workbook for "Worrying".

Sources

https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/sleep-and-mental-health

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/can-a-lack-of-sleep-cause/>

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