

Life Transitions Newsletter

June 2007



Dear Clients,

One of the strongest contributors to anxiety, depression and weight gain is not getting enough sleep.

Our society even gives it status stating that a person skimping on sleep equates with dedication to work and/or family! This is far from the truth – getting enough sleep ensures that you will be able to meet the needs of family, work and community.

Since sleep is key to our mental well being, I have dedicated this newsletter to catching the right amount of shuteye.

Sincerely,

Penny Blazej, LCSW, BCD

The Importance of Sleep

I am going to get a little technical, so stay with me. It is important to understand the cycles of sleep.

Sleep is **essential** for mental and physical restoration. Sleep is a cycle with two separate states: rapid eye movement (REM), the stage in which most dreaming occurs; and non-REM (NREM).

Four stages of sleep take place during NREM: stage I, when the person passes from relaxed wakefulness; stage II, an early stage of light sleep; stages III and IV, which are increasing degrees of deep sleep. Most stage IV sleep (also called delta sleep), occurs in the first several hours of sleep. A period of REM sleep normally follows a period of NREM sleep. The amount of REM sleeps will determine whether you wake up rested and refreshed.

Insomnia

So what happens when you do not get “good” sleep – a condition called insomnia.

According to CBS Health Watch, “insomnia is such a widespread problem that "people buy more over-the-counter and prescription sleeping medications than any other drug.

Insomnia is the inability to obtain an adequate amount or quality of sleep. The difficulty can be in falling asleep, remaining asleep, or both. People with insomnia do not feel refreshed when they wake up. Insomnia is a common symptom affecting millions of people.

In fact, a 1999 American Medical Association (AMA) report cited that approximately 30% of adults in the United States suffer occasionally from insomnia and 10% experience chronic insomnia.

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Causes of Insomnia

According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleeplessness or insomnia is a symptom and may be caused by: stress, anxiety, depression, disease, pain, medications, sleep disorders, menopause, poor sleep habits and sleep environment and health habits.

Transient insomnia is often caused by a temporary situation in a person's life, such as an argument with a loved one, a brief medical illness, or jet lag. When the situation is resolved or the precipitating factor disappears, the condition goes away, usually without medical treatment.

Prescription drugs such as asthma medicine, steroids, and anti-depressants can cause insomnia. Sleeplessness may also be a side effect of over-the-counter products like nasal decongestants and appetite suppressants.

Chronic insomnia usually has different causes, and there may be more than one. These include:

1. A medical condition or its treatment, including sleep apnea, arthritis, a heart condition, and asthma.
2. Use of such substances as caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine.
3. Psychiatric conditions like mood or anxiety disorders.
4. Stress or depression, such as sadness caused by the loss of a loved one or a job.
5. Disturbed sleep cycles caused by a change in work shift.
6. Sleep-disordered breathing, such as snoring.

7. Periodic jerky leg movements, nocturnal myoclonus, which happen just as the individual is falling asleep.
8. Repeated nightmares or panic attacks during sleep.

Another cause is excessive worrying about whether or not a person will be able to fall asleep, which creates so much anxiety that the individual's bedtime rituals and behavior actually trigger insomnia. This is called psychophysiological insomnia.

Sleep Apnea

Couples have come to me with significant troubles in their marriage that have been traced to an undiagnosed sleep apnea condition. Remember that not only does the spouse with sleep apnea get fragmented sleep so does their partner because their sleep is interrupted by loud snoring and/or kicking.

Sleep apnea is a condition characterized by episodes of breathing stoppage during sleep. It can be easily diagnosed by a sleep lab and the treatment is generally a C-Pap machine that puts air pressure to the throat keeping it open long enough for the oxygen to get into the lungs.

Older obese men seem to be at higher risk, though as many as 40% of people with obstructive sleep apnea are not obese. Ingestion of alcohol or sedatives before sleep may predispose one to episodes of apnea.

The blockage of oxygen can lead to severe conditions like pulmonary hypertension; heart failure; abnormal heart rhythm; excessive carbon dioxide levels (hypercapnia) and stroke.

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There are many sites on the Internet that address sleeping problems. The one that I found most helpful was HealthLine at <http://www.healthline.com/adamcontent/sleep>, the American Sleep Disorders Association site at <http://www.asda.org> and National Sleep Foundation. Site at <http://www.sleepfoundation.org>.

Treatments

For other types of insomnia there are five primary treatments:

1. Mind/Body relaxation
2. Herbal Teas
3. Aromatherapy and Hydrotherapy
4. Melatonin
5. Allopathic (drug) treatment
 - a) Antidepressants
 - b) Hormonal Therapy
 - c) Sleeping aids

Penny's 12 Step Organic Recipe

Many of my clients have benefited from my organic recipe for good sleep. It incorporates three of the above treatments and is ALL-natural with no side effects, except feeling refreshed in the morning.

1. No caffeine after 3:00 p.m. (that includes chocolate)
2. Limited alcohol (no more than one drink) before 6:00 p.m. It is better not to have any alcohol because it interrupts the sleep cycle.
3. Go to bed at the same time every night

4. Do the same bedtime ritual like first taking shower/bath then brush teeth etc...
5. Create a relaxing bedroom environment like soft lighting, no TV or stimulating music, plants and soft earth colors.
6. One half-hour before bed eat 3ozs of turkey nothing with it just the turkey. The amino acid tryptophan can help you fall asleep.
7. Take a hot bath or shower and use some lavender soap or oil. Inhale deeply
8. Ten minutes before falling asleep drink 8oz of warm milk (grandma was right!)
9. Do three sets of deep breathing exercises
10. Lie in the bed and close your eyes – imagine a relaxing safe place.
11. If you are not asleep in 15 minutes, get up and leave the bedroom. Do something that is not stimulating like read a magazine (generally TV is not a good idea because it can cause anxiety).
12. Once you start feeling sleepy go back to bed and repeat 9-11 until you fall asleep.

Good Luck and Sweet Dreams

Your Comments

Let me know if this newsletter was helpful for you. Just e-mail me at pblazej@vcweb.org.