



By  
Nik Nikam, M.D.

Johnson, a patient of mine had heart surgery. While I was making my rounds, I asked, "Mr. Johnson, how did you sleep last night?"

"I did sleep all night. I was tossing and turning," he said.

"But, Mr. Johnson, the nurse's notes says that you slept very well. You did not even ask for a sleeping pill."

"Whatever!" He said.

The next day I asked, "Mr. Johnson, how did you sleep last night?"

"I told you Dr. Nik, I did not sleep all night. I was miserable. Those sleeping pills don't do me any good," he said.

"But, Mr. Johnson, the nurse's notes says that you slept very well."

The third day, I asked the same question. Mr. Johnson replied, "I do not know Dr. Nik. I will have to check the nurse's notes!"

### *What is sleep?*

Sleep is a state of temporary unconsciousness. The almighty in his infinite wisdom created sleep to bridge the gap between despair and hope. A normal adult usually falls asleep within 5 to 15 minutes of lying down. There are five stages of sleep: stage one represents the skeletal muscle relaxation, drooping of the eye lids, rolling of the eyes, and decrease in brain wave voltage. The stage two is characterized by high-amplitude, and sharp slow-wave complexes in the brain waves. Stages

three and four represent deep sleep. Final stage involves further muscle relaxation and bursts of rapid eye movements (REM sleep). The first four stages, also known as the non REM or NREM lasts from 70 to 100 minutes. Both the REM and NREM cycles repeat four to five times during a night. Most complete sleep cycles last 90 to 100 minutes. It is important to keep this in mind that if you try to take a nap on Sunday morning in the church with your loud snore, you may run the risk of waking up others.

### *What changes occur during sleep?*

Dreams usually occur during the REM sleep cycle. The dreams may be related to something that your mind may be working on, or totally unrelated. It is much easier to awaken someone during the NREM sleep cycle than during REM sleep cycle. It is uncommon to see people in drenching sweat following a bad dream. There is gross involuntary body movements which is normal. Over activity of aminergic hormones may cause sleep disturbance. Hence, aminergic blockers such as diazepam may be useful in restoring sleep in some individuals. Similarly, reduced aminergic activity could lead to excess sleep which can be counteracted by aminergic stimulants such as amphetamines. However, these amphetamines may sometimes be used for excess stimulation and for avoiding sleep during term finals by young people. Some people may experience heart burn at night due to acid reflux into the esophagus. Rarely some people may experience sour taste in the mouth, coughing, choking or respiratory difficulty.

### *What are the effects of sleep loss?*

Deprived of sleep, laboratory animals have died within a few days, despite being well fed, watered, and housed. A study done in young medical students, who were deprived of sleep from 3 to 4 days, experienced increased mental and physical fatigue, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. Performance of their skilled motor activity deteriorated. If your partner complains of not having had good sleep for several days, then watch out for these signs and do not let that person get behind a wheel. Occasionally, lack of sleep can unmask psychotic behavior or irrational temper. Lately, has your boss been acting strange! Why not offer a sleep vacation.

### *What are abnormal sleep conditions?*

Insomnia refers to an inability in initiating and maintaining sound sleep, which could be related to pain, drugs, anxiety, and worry. In some cases it may be the first symptom of a depression. Caffeine containing drinks, amphetamines, and cigarettes are some of the causes of insomnia. A new place or jet lag can also interfere with sleep. This condition can be treated with a short course of mild sedatives. However, if the condition persists, you need a complete medical checkup.

Narcolepsy is a condition marked by excessive and uncontrollable tendency to sleep during the daytime. People may fall asleep anywhere and sometimes while they are behind the wheels. Such people may benefit from adrenergic stimulants under the supervision of a specialist. Regular sleep at night and proper scheduling of daytime naps may minimize interference with work.

Sleep walking is a condition where a person during actual sleep may get up and walk around the

house, climb stairs, or even cook food. These episodes may last about 15 minutes before they are terminated by returning to bed or awakening. Locking doors and keeping dangerous objects beyond this person's reach may minimize the damage. Some people may be used to talking during sleep. You may want to select the words you say, as your spouse may use it against you for the rest of your life.

Sleep apnea, a condition seen in obese people, is associated with sleep that is interrupted numerous times during due to lack of oxygen. It also can cause heart rhythm problems and is usually treated with a breathing machine. Sleep studies can help in the diagnosis of this condition.

### *How to get a good night sleep?*

First, maintain regular sleeping habits. If you go to sleep at 2 AM in the morning, then you cannot expect to get adequate sleep. You will be sleep deprived. Set a time for your sleep depending upon when you have to report to work.

You need an adequate amount of sleep. A baby can sleep for 20 hours. A child needs 10-12 hours of sleep, and an adult needs 6-7 hours of sleep. Women tend to sleep a little more than men.

Avoid taking afternoon naps. It could cost you your job which can lead to sleepless nights.

Avoid caffeine late in the evening as it interferes with sleep. Caffeine is not only found in coffee or tea, but most soft drinks and cold medicines.

Make sure that you have a firm mattress and you sleep on your designated side of the bed that has been assigned to you by your spouse.

Most people feel sleepy after a long day and then get behind the wheel to rush home. If you are too

sleepy, take a brief 10 minute nap in your office or in the lobby before you hit the road.

Avoid late, heavy, and fatty meals at night times. Don't top that off with coffee and alcohol.

Jet lag occurs when we travel abroad where the time zones are off by several hours. It takes several days for the body to get adjusted. You can try to adjust to the new time zone by taking a sedative at night-time in the new place.

Make sure you have completed all your tasks before you go to bed. If you have some unfinished business on your mind, your mind starts to work on it all night. If you have to solve a problem, write down the possible solutions.

Some people take afternoon naps on the weekends to catch up with the sleep they lost during the busy week days.

Good exercise in the evening will help you to get a good night sleep.

Keep room temperature steady. The early morning hours may have the lowest temperature and a space heater may be useful to keep the temperature steady.

If you cannot sleep, don't force. Get up and do some reading or get busy with an activity. When you are tired, you will fall asleep.

Use sleeping pills very sparingly and only under a physician's guidance. Address the underlying problem that causes the lack of sleep.

**Disclosure:** The information provided here is for educational purpose only. Please consult with your physician for any medical advice.

Visit [www.sugarlandheartcenter.com](http://www.sugarlandheartcenter.com) for more information.

P: 281-265-7567

[nikam@alltel.net](mailto:nikam@alltel.net)