

Implications of Disturbed Sleep

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Letter to Editor

Sleep is an essential life function. It is as important to our sound health as the meals we eat, the liquids we drink and the oxygen we inhale. Unfortunately, sleep is taken for granted. Sleep is a complex neuro-physiological state, with its primary function of providing rest to various body parts including mind in order to restore the energy levels. The duration of sleep needed by an adult person varies between 7 h to 8.5 h. Often, executives/leaders consider sleep as a waste of time. They miss their normal sleep to achieve their targets. Sleep deprivation has now become a common attribute of our society, affecting children, adults and senior citizens alike. More than ninety-nine types of sleep disorders affect billions of individuals all over the world. The value of sleep can be best appreciated from the fact that we spend about one-third of our lifespan in sleep. Lack of sleep reduces our alertness, impairs our judgment and affects our moods. Impairment of cognitive functions due to sleep deprivation not only leads to a loss of productivity at school or work, but also contributes to increased accident rates due to drowsy driving. Disturbed sleep, whether in quality, quantity and proper timing can have many adverse health consequences. A sleep disorder not only is a risk factor for subsequent development of certain neuropsychiatric disorders but also a potential

warning sign for congestive heart failure, osteoarthritis, diabetes etc. These disorders are broadly of following types: i) Chronic Insomnia: inability to fall and stay asleep; ii) Sleep apnea: breathlessness while sleeping; iii) Hypersomnia: excessive day-time sleepiness; iv) Parasomnia: sleep-walking, partial arousal disorders, REM behaviour disorder; v) Night terrors/Night mares: an emotional episode in which person awakens in fear with feelings of anxiety; vi) Circadian rhythm sleep disorder: jet lag, shift work disorder; vii) Narcolepsy-cataplexy syndrome: usually includes sudden onset of sleep with sudden loss of muscle tone and hallucinations, when falling asleep or waking up; viii) Restless legs syndrome: feeling of restlessness and abnormal sensation in the legs that typically occur in the evening, when lying down, which is improved by movement of legs. Majority of the patients of sleep disorders prefer non-pharmacological solution over allopathic-medicines to get relief. Allopathic-medicines include application of hypnotics, sedatives, anti-anxiety and anti-depressant drugs whereas, non-drug therapies comprise of yoga, meditation, music therapy, deep breathing techniques (pranayam) and progressive muscle relaxation. Both the disasters, Bhopal (India) gas leak disaster and Challenger (United States) Space shuttle disaster are attributed to disturbed sleep-related impaired judgment at the work-place.