

A Good Night's Sleep? Dream On!

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Only in the last century have we discovered that the brain is highly active during sleep.

Most healthy adults need 7.5 to 9 hours sleep regularly to function at their best, although needs vary from person to person.

Well, science has several reasons. First, sleep conserves energy at a time when little is happening. Unfortunately, the amount of energy saved is rather small and insignificant. Second, the time asleep gives us a period of protected time when we can sort out the experiences we have had throughout the day, either for discarding or carefully filing them away in the brain. Third, it gives the body time to heal any damage sustained to mind and body during the day. This involves restoring affected tissues, organs and systems to as close to normal as possible. However, this also happens whilst we are awake to an extent. In light of this, it could be said the reason for sleep remains an enigma.

Tibb has a more plausible explanation. Its philosophy and research support the notion that sleep is a time set aside to allow Physis to operate uninterrupted on both the body and the mind, to restore harmony after the stresses of our less-than-harmonious lives, and to sort out the myriad experiences, sensations and emotional turmoil that goes with the territory of everyday life.

Physis maintains harmony between Man's nature, his lifestyle and the environment which surrounds him.

Tibb supports the belief that most ailments are healed from within. Even when healing is achieved from outside, the physician, medication and any treatment are there to help Physis along. Tibb also accepts that all actions by physicians should support Physis, not counteract it or push it to one side.

Physis, therefore, embraces all possible reasons for sleep - it oversees and organises the restocking of the body's energy shelves; it files away all knowledge and experience; it balances emotions and restores the immune function to prime condition. Physis therefore, serves to renew harmony.

But back to sleep! We now know why Hippocrates, the acknowledged Father of Medicine, identified a good night's sleep as a major factor for keeping us in balanced and robust health. He didn't know at the time (after all, it was 2500 years ago), but today, we have sufficient supporting evidence to show that good sleep and better health go together. For example there is a definite connection between poor sleep quality and a greater chance of developing type 2 diabetes. Even more ominously, sleep, or lack of it, seems to underlie the onset of chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure. This can be a concern if the person has a raised cholesterol level, as it would increase the chances of a stroke or heart attack. It is also found that too little sleep may be linked to excess weight gain, depression, thyroid disorders and anxiety.

Hippocrates also pointed out that good sleep quality works in harness with other Lifestyle Factors. Have you ever wondered why your bowel movements are more regular in the mornings? There could possibly be a link between sleep and elimination. Furthermore, If someone is eating badly, or not getting some exercise, or is troubled emotionally, then the benefit of a good night's sleep can be frittered away. If you need an alarm clock to wake you up every morning, you are probably not getting enough quality sleep.

Alas, when you are battling to meet the calls of modern life, cutting back on sleep seems a reasonable response. Can you afford a daily eight hour, or so, time to sleep? If truth be told, you cannot afford not to. A chronic sleep deficit is a serious threat to long-term health. Sleep is essential for optimum health just as nutrition, toxin elimination and exercise are.

Sleep is also a major development need for the young. We now know that children suffering from chronic sleep deprivation - an increasingly important consequence of our modern screen-based, technologically controlled society - are at risk of serious physical and mental health issues. The changes in growth hormone in young adolescents have been documented over the past twenty years, with worrying results. The definite link between lifestyle and growth cannot be ignored. Sleep and diet being the most important of these factors.

The quality of your sleep is reflected in the quality of your waking life. Your emotional harmony, your social vitality, your creative ability, your physical energy, your mental acuity and your productivity respond very well to a good sleep balance, not to a chronic sleep overdraft.

There is probably no investment in a person's lifestyle which returns so rich a dividend in both short- and long-term health benefits than does good quality sleep.