



Sleep Matters

When you think of the word 'sleep' do you sigh and wish for more? Or, do you think if I could get less sleep I could get more done? Chances are, you wish for more. The reality is that many Canadians do not get enough sleep. Regardless of how we think of sleep, it is an important function our bodies cannot go without. Our bodies need sleep in order to feel refreshed, alert, and ready to tackle the next day's tasks. Even one night of poor sleep can affect response time, motor ability, memory, and concentration.

Are You Getting Enough Sleep?

There are many reasons why someone might not be getting the quantity and quality of sleep they need. It could be stress, too much caffeine, drinking alcohol before bed, others awake in the house, staying up too late, or getting up too early. Medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, poorly controlled asthma, acid reflux, or living with painful symptoms from cancer or arthritis can also affect a person's sleep. Having a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety can also have an effect on the person's quantity and quality of sleep. If sleep problems continue for more than a few weeks despite an individual's attempts to improve their sleep habits, it could be something more serious such as a sleep disorder. Individuals should speak with their healthcare provider if their sleep problems persist.

Why is it Important That I Get Enough Sleep?

Millions of individuals are affected by sleep disorders. In fact, according to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 20% of adults in the United States alone have chronic sleep and wakefulness disorder. Sleep disorders are medical disorders that impact the quantity and quality of sleep we get. This in turn can interfere with our daily routines.

Sleep deprivation from a sleep disorder has been linked to many chronic physical health issues and diseases such as a weakened immune system, hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, stroke and obesity. Consider the link between sleep and obesity for example. When we sleep our bodies release hormones that help control appetite, regulate our energy levels, and process glucose. When we do not get enough sleep, we can upset this process. In fact, the hormone that tells us we



have had enough food to eat (leptin) can become lowered when our sleep is affected, resulting in us having more food cravings even after we have eaten. This can lead to over eating and unhealthy weight gain over the long term.

Our mental health also becomes affected by sleep deprivation. Over time individuals who do not get enough sleep may begin to feel stressed, sad, angry, have negative thoughts, and become mentally exhausted. This in turn, can lead to mood disorders such as depression and anxiety. The reverse of this is true as well. Many individuals who suffer from clinical depression or anxiety can experience a sleep disorder such as insomnia, thus increasing their risk for additional health concerns.

Perhaps less obvious, but equally important, is the fact that lack of sleep or poor quality sleep, has been linked to many predictable injuries. For example, motor vehicle crashes, occupational errors, and industrial disasters related to poor sleep have resulted in billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs. To this point, a recent study found that truck drivers who had untreated sleep apnea were five times more likely to be involved in a crash from driver fatigue than truck drivers who had been treated for sleep apnea. These crashes usually occur because sleep deprivation acts like a form of impairment similar to that experienced by someone who is driving under the influence of alcohol.

What Are Some Common Types of Sleep Disorders?

There are more than 80 medically recognized sleep disorders with many different symptoms, causes, and treatments. Some of the more common sleep disorders are insomnia, sleep apnea, and narcolepsy.

Insomnia:

The symptoms of insomnia can include: difficulty falling asleep; waking up several times during the night; waking up earlier than planned and not being able to fall back asleep; and, daytime sleepiness. Many will experience short-term insomnia (1 or 2 days) from time to time but when it persists for long periods it can become chronic insomnia. Insomnia usually develops from a pattern of poor sleep habits (e.g., consuming alcohol before bed, regular excessive intake of caffeine). In addition, the effects of certain medications such as antidepressants, steroids, and allergy/cold products can contribute to insomnia. Insomnia can also develop or worsen from a pre-existing physical (e.g., arthritis) or mental health condition (e.g., depression, anxiety).



First-line treatment options should focus on improving sleep practices (sleep hygiene). Your healthcare provider will support you with this and other options that are appropriate for you such as cognitive behaviour therapy to address the worries and fears of not falling asleep, meditation, and if necessary-medications

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

This is the most common type of sleep apnea. Key signs and symptoms include loud snoring at night and daytime sleepiness. OSA occurs when an individual's airway becomes partially or completely blocked due to the relaxation of the muscles in the throat. This can happen many times during sleep, causing the individual to wake up several times in order to regain control of the muscles in the neck. Risk factors for OSA include: obesity (i.e., weight gain around the neck and stomach); inherited traits such as small jaw size or overbite; and, consuming alcohol before sleep. Treatment for OSA can include lifestyle approaches (e.g., losing weight, not drinking alcohol) and/or the use of equipment such as a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) device which helps keep the airway open. In some cases, dental devices are used to pull the lower jaw forward and clear the airway. In more serious cases, surgery may be required to remove some of the soft tissue in the back of the throat to help make the airway larger.

Narcolepsy

This disorder is characterized by daytime sleepiness and sudden unpredictable "sleep attacks" in which the individual falls asleep. Many individuals who have this disorder also experience sleep paralysis and hallucinations. This disorder can make it difficult to hold a full-time job and usually will require a medical clearance to operate a motor vehicle. There is no cure for narcolepsy, but it can be treated with the use of medications that can help reduce daytime sleepiness, prevent sudden sleep paralysis and hallucinations.

How Do I Prevent or Manage A Sleep Disorder?

There are many things that can contribute to developing a sleep disorder; from poor sleep practices, to unhealthy lifestyle choices to an existing medical condition such as arthritis or depression. To help reduce the risk of a sleep disorder, it is recommended that we use good sleep hygiene practices. Sleep hygiene refers to a variety of habits and routines we can do leading up to and at bedtime to help our bodies relax



and get ready to sleep. For more information on sleep hygiene tips check out <http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/getting/overcoming/tips>. If left untreated, sleep disorders can lead to more serious physical/mental health condition or injury. It is important to speak to your healthcare provider if you are having ongoing problems with your sleep. They can help diagnose, treat, and manage the disorder before it leads to further serious health concerns.

Make It Happen At Your Workplace:

- Provide water and a variety of non-caffeinated beverages in workplace vending machines and cafeterias.
- For co-workers who live close by, it can be a great idea to arrange group transportation. This can be helpful for co-workers who work shifts and might be too tired to drive home putting them at risk for falling asleep at the wheel.
- Host a presentation with an expert on sleep disorders and sleep hygiene to identify common sleep problems and encourage good sleep habits.
- Provide sleep diaries for employees to review their sleeping patterns and sleep hygiene. This diary can be a useful tool to reinforce positive sleep hygiene as well as for someone who is having difficulty sleeping to review with their healthcare provider.

True and False Section

1. Obesity is a risk factor for obstructive sleep apnea. T & F
2. You should only practice sleep hygiene if you have a sleep disorder. T& F
3. Having a couple of glasses of wine before bed will help you sleep better. T & F
4. Napping can help with the sleep disorder narcolepsy. T & F
5. An existing medical condition (e.g., acid reflux) can disrupt our sleep patterns. T & F
6. It is a good idea to sleep in on your days off from work so you can catch up on sleep. T & F

Answers: 1 T 2 F 3 F 4 T 5 T 6 F

Websites: