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November 2015

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Sleep Tight

A woman with long brown hair is sleeping peacefully in a bed. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and is lying on her side, facing left. Her head is resting on a white pillow. The background is a soft-focus view of the bedroom.

Getting enough sleep and rest is essential for the human body to function properly. By Shari Barbanel

Sleep is essential for everyone, but unfortunately most Americans do not get enough of it. According to the National Sleep Foundation, the recommended amount of sleep is 10 to 11 hours per night for children, 8.5 to 9.25 for teenagers and seven to nine hours for adults. However, nearly 30 percent of adults get less than six hours of sleep per night.

"The majority of Americans do not get optimal sleep," said Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, *Natural Practitioner* advisory board member and director of the Practitioners Alliance Network. "The average night's sleep in the United States used to be nine hours a night until 130 years ago when light bulbs were developed. It has now dropped to 6.75—basically a 30 percent pay cut for your body."

Stress and anxiety have a lot to do with the inability to get a good night's rest, according to Penny Kendall-Reed, ND, medical advisor to Pennsylvania-based Douglas Laboratories, who noted that more than half of all sleep problems are caused by these

issues. "Chronic stress results in a loss of negative feedback within the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) axis leading to continued production of cortisol, which persists independently of the stressful stimulus," she explained. "This shifts the natural circadian rhythm of cortisol secretion and creates a glucocorticoid peak at 2-4 a.m. This not only wakes the individual but also impairs stage-4 delta wave recuperative sleep. Regular sedatives and sleep aids are ineffective for this problem."

Douglas Labs' Sereniten Plus helps restore normal functioning of the HPA axis. Dysfunction of the HPA and loss of feedback is one of the main causes of sleep disturbance ranging from occasional nighttime waking to chronic insomnia. "Establishing a normal stress response permanently fixes the problem and restores healthful, restorative sleep," said Dr. Kendall-Reed. "Supplements that simply mop up excess glucocorticoid production or lower cortisol release are far less effective since once the supplement is

stopped, the underlying problem of HPA dysregulation still exists."

Mary Bove, ND, medical educator for Gaia Herbs, Inc. in North Carolina noted that pain and inflammation are also commonly linked to sleep issues, and that those with a hormonal imbalance—such as women experiencing menopause, people who are magnesium deficient or those with adrenals that are fatigued are more likely to need support for restful sleep. "Adrenal fatigue" is a term people are hearing in the media more often, and that is starting the conversation around healthy stress response, restful sleep and balanced hormones," Dr. Bove explained. "As resiliency becomes a more common topic, that too becomes part of the conversation about stress and, in turn, sleep."

According to Dr. Kendall-Reed, other factors that lead to tossing and turning all night include poor diet, lack of exercise, medication, and health conditions such as obesity, gastric reflux, sinus congestion and hyper-

Sleep Tight

thyroidism. In addition, our dependence and overuse of smartphones, tablets and computers can also impact the quality of sleep we get. "A lack of sufficient sleep and rest may have a variety of causes for any one individual. Environmental factors such as light—especially the type of light that comes from constant access to a screen, as on a smartphone—can significantly influence sleep cycles through influencing the release, or lack thereof, of sleep hormones," explained Adam Killpatrick, DC, CNS, *Natural Practitioner* advisory board member and chief science officer of Vermont-based FoodScience Corporation (maker of DaVinci Laboratories of Vermont products). "The American work schedule and notions of productivity may also be related to insufficient sleep. Finally, sleep and wakefulness disorders are incredibly common, with an estimated 50-70 million adults in

the United States experiencing some type. Sleep apnea and insomnia are two important and well-known sleep disorders.¹

"There is a higher bar set on everything we do in our culture," added Andreas Koch, vice president of marketing for Texas-based Natural Vitality. "We work more hours per year than most countries around the globe. Even away from work, the body's 'switch is turned on' and that affects our overall health. We are having more difficult time finding time to relax or 'turn our switch off.'"

Making Changes

When dealing with sleep issues, Americans often turn to over-the-counter (OTC) sleep aids or talk to their doctor about prescription medications, such as Ambien or Lunesta. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly nine million adults in the U.S. take prescription sleep aids. But often, these pills come with unwanted side effects such as nightmares, daytime drowsiness or a feeling of being "hungover" the next day. Further, these aids are meant to be used in the short term, but many people become reliant on them, and some are unable to sleep without them. Even more worrisome, some people turn to alcohol to help them sleep.

According to Carolyn Dean, MD, ND,



medical advisory board member of the Nutritional Magnesium Association, these sleep aids have "probably fallen out of favor because they don't really work," she said. "Sleeping pills have a warning that they are for short-term use only or you can become addicted and can suffer from many harmful side effects. And people can become addicted to alcohol if they use it inappropriately to help them sleep. Thus, they search for other options."

Discussing Lifestyles

Sleep disorders often occur due to other issues in the body, such as a hormone imbalance, poor diet or a lack of exercise. Dr. Bove noted that in her practice, she talks to patients about their lives to try to pinpoint their issues. "In my naturopathic practice, when people came to me to talk about sleep, I take a step back and ask them about their lifestyle and habits. Sleep is rarely just about the hours we spend in bed resting," she explained.

"I would ask about their evening habits—are they winding down or getting worked up just before bed? Are they eating a big meal late at night or burning the midnight oil?" she continued. "Are they exercising during the day—or perhaps too close to bedtime? Are they using alcohol, caffeine or nicotine?"

"One thing practitioners might want to look at doing in practice is connecting sleep to their symptoms," added Dr. Killpatrick. "Include sleep questions on the intake. Not simply how many hours do they sleep, but the quality of the sleep, if they feel rested when they wake, etc."

Dr. Killpatrick also noted that it is important for practitioners to remember that not all patients have the same natural sleep cycle and it is best to find programs or ideas that work for each individual patient. "Developing a healthy sleep routine, choosing to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning, for example, can be a part of the solution," he said. "Similarly, striving for consistency and moderation in diet and exercise, screen time, and even temperature of the sleeping space can have an influence. Caffeine in the afternoon, large meals before bedtime and nicotine should be avoided."

Tips For Sound Sleeping

Mary Bove, ND, medical educator for Gaia Herbs, Inc. noted that a bedtime routine is beneficial for those that have trouble sleeping. Here, she offers some small, sustainable lifestyle changes that patients can apply to their daily lives to help them get some shuteye:

- Having a bedtime routine is important. If you want a restful night's sleep, you need to slow down in the evening. That means making sure there isn't a lot of excessive light, digital screens in the bedroom, etc. Don't eat too late—try to have your last meal at least four hours before bed. (A light snack 30 minutes before bed is fine for those whose blood sugar tends to be low.) Get some exercise to help get you good and tired, and eat a healthy, well-balanced diet during the day. Those will all contribute to sleep hygiene.

- Some easy, enjoyable ways to unwind are to take a bath, preferably with herbs and Epsom salts, or drink a cup of herbal tea. One of my colleagues recommends her patients with sleep and stress concerns have a mug of herbal tea in the evening, and she

insists that part of the routine be that nothing else can happen while you're drinking your tea. You sit, sip and savor; the rest can wait. I like that idea—to use tea as a meditative ritual. (And the herbs in the tea could also support rest and healthy sleep.)

- Though as adults we scoff at the idea, a regular bedtime is important. Our bodies naturally like to go to sleep and wake up at the same time.

- After dinner is not the time to stimulate or invigorate the mind and body. I often tell people who want to sleep better to avoid stimulating or agitating conversations at night. That includes rehashing work stress to your partner. (Let it go as part of building resilience.) I also say no 11 p.m. news and no suspenseful 10 p.m. TV shows—use our round-the-clock access to technology to your advantage and catch up on headlines or your favorite program tomorrow morning or afternoon. Instead, do some light yoga and read something entertaining but not stimulating. (Save sudoku and crosswords for morning, too).

Supplements for Sleep

In addition to making lifestyle changes to help patients sleep, supplementation may be beneficial. "Health supplements designed for sleep and rest are well placed in today's market," said Crystal D. Webber, MS, RD, manager, product development for New Jersey-based Ajinmoto North America, Inc. "Many lifestyle and behavioral modifications can

greatly improve sleep quality. However, those modifications are not easy or even possible for some individuals in the U.S. Medications are available but clients and their health care practitioners often prefer to try a natural intervention first."

Ajinmoto's dietary sleep aid, Glysom, has the active ingredient glycine, an endogenous amino acid and the most prevalent amino acid in our food supply. The targeted dose of glycine in Glysom, when taken right before bed, can promote sounder and more restful sleep. Since Glysom is non-habit forming and does not cause morning drowsiness it does have advantages over some other types of sleep aids and medications.

Webber explained that Glysom helps to induce sleep by resetting the body's "internal clock." "This happens thanks to a complex process of cellular activity that signals the body to relax and prepare for a more satisfying and restful sleep," she said. "Glysom contains glycine, a specific amino acid, which is produced in the body and can be found in many of the proteins we eat."

According to Dr. Kendall-Reed, melatonin is needed to restore rejuvenating delta wave sleep and reduce sleep latency. Stress and cortisol block the production of melatonin, which is needed to shift the brain from alpha wave stage-3 sleep into deep, healing delta wave stage-4 sleep, the only place where the body and brain heal. "Melatonin is an important sleep aid that pushes one into stage-4 delta wave sleep, the only version of sleep that is healing and rejuvenating," she explained. "Melatonin is also a brain antioxidant that may help delay the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's. Melatonin increases apoptosis and interferes with estrogen binding onto cancerous cells. It is important to note that melatonin is not a true sedative used to put one to sleep, but rather restores the quality of sleep."

Dr. Killpatrick also recommends GABA, the adaptogen ashwagandha and l-theanine because they all have supportive effects on the sleep cycle, calmness and relaxation.* DaVinci' Laboratories offers a number of products that support sleep, including Sleep Benefits, which provides botanical and nutrient support for optimal sleep with a clinically relevant dose of melatonin and direct support for the neurotransmitters associated with tranquility and relaxation.* According to the company, Sleep

Benefits includes Bluenesse, a branded form of lemon balm, which has traditionally been used to not only support a healthy stress response, but also to promote healthy sleep habits. In order to truly support long term balance to the sleep cycle, it is essential to support the circadian rhythm, which is accomplished effortlessly by the evidence-based Sensoril Ashwagandha.*

"We also carry l-theanine, which helps promote a restful state and improved quality of sleep, and Liposomal Melatonin Spray, which is a great choice for sleep support

because it contains 3 mg of high quality melatonin in a liposomal form for optimized delivery,*" Dr. Killpatrick said. "Another popular choice is our Valer Amino to support muscle relaxation and normal sleep. It contains

amino acids, valerian root, herbs and B vitamins to aid in relaxation.*"

Gaia Herbs has three formulations to support specific sleep needs: Sound Sleep, to support a quick transition to sleep; SleepThru, to support sleeping through the night; and Sleep & Relax, to ready the body for sleep.* "One of our newest formulations is Turmeric Supreme Pain P.M., which supports restful sleep and a healthy response to occasional pain.* And I would also consider Adrenal Health, our best-selling synergistic blend of five adaptogenic herbs, to be a part of this category.* The single herb Liquid Phyto-Caps Kava Kava Root and Valerian Root are also on our best-sellers list.* In our GaiaKids line, we have Sleep & Relax Herbal Syrup, to promote a sense of calm while supporting a restful night's sleep so children feel refreshed upon waking.*"

Magnesium also plays a key role with sleep. According to WebMD, research shows that magnesium even a marginal lack of can prevent the brain from settling down at night. "Magnesium is a simple effective sleep remedy and should be a first line of treatment," noted Andrea Rosanoff, PhD, director of research at the Center for Magnesium Education & Research. "We need to replenish our supply of magnesium every day. Since magnesium is constantly in motion in our cells, tissues, circulating blood, we lose a bit each day as skin cells slough off, as we sweat, as our hair and fingernails grow, and in our urine as our kidneys clean our blood."

Natural Vitality's Natural Calm features a proprietary formula that provides a highly

absorbable, water-soluble magnesium in ionic form (having molecular charge that allows the element to easily bond with water), so it is ready to go to work right away, according to the company. Natural Vitality also offers Natural Calm Plus Calcium and Natural Calm Cream.

Because sleep plays a such vital role in a person's health and well-being, getting enough quality sleep can help protect not only an individual's mental and physical health, but their quality of life and safety as well. "Educate them [patients] that eight hours a night is optimal, especially if fatigue, pain or immune dysfunction are present and offer them the supplements and sleep hygiene tips that can help them," Dr. Teitelbaum concluded. 

*These statements have not been evaluated by the food and drug administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

References:

- 1 Institute of Medicine. *Sleep Disorders and Sleep Deprivation: An Unmet Public Health Problem*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2006.

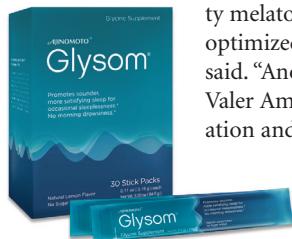
■ According to the National Sleep Foundation, nearly 30 percent of adults get less than six hours of sleep per night.

■ An estimated 50-70 million adults in the United States experience some type of sleep and wakefulness disorder.

■ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) nearly nine million adults in the U.S. take prescription sleep aids.

■ GABA, the adaptogen ashwagandha and l-theanine all have supportive effects on the sleep cycle, calmness and relaxation.

Healthy Take Aways



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Ajinomoto North America, Inc., (201) 292-3200, www.ajinomoto-usa.com
- DaVinci Laboratories of Vermont, (800) 325-1776, www.davincilabs.com
- Douglas Laboratories, (800) 245-4440 www.douglaslabs.com
- Gaia Herbs, Inc., (800) 831-7780, www.gaiaherbs.com
- Natural Vitality, (800) 446-7462, www.naturalvitality.com