

Most people can honestly admit that they have or currently have trouble sleeping. We've all been through those seemingly endless late-night fits of tossing and turning. Often we look to household remedies to get us back to sleep, such as a warm glass of milk or reading until our eyelids get heavy. The reality is that 40 million people in the United States alone suffer from some kind of sleep disorder (Sleep). Paying little attention to seemingly harmless symptoms of sleep deprivation can ultimately lead to permanent and undesirable health issues.

So, then, why is it important to get an adequate amount of sleep? The Harvard Women's Health Watch discusses six valid points that address the importance of sleep. The first reason has to do with the human learning process, whether it is in school, at work, or elsewhere. Through the sleeping process, the brain absorbs newly learned information and assigns it to memory. This is a process called memory consolidation (Importance).

Second is the ever-popular category of weight fluctuation and the metabolic process. Since the beginning of time, people search for the reasons for their weight gain or weight loss. While it is often connected to eating habits and exercise, studies have shown that sleep deprivation is a major contributing factor to weight gain. Once sleep becomes irregular, the way our bodies break down carbohydrates becomes ineffective. This is a result of a change in hormonal activity due to sleep loss (Importance).

The third reason has to do with general safety. If someone does not get enough sleep, they will be several times more likely to fall asleep during the day- on the job, during class, while driving, etc. Falling asleep while driving or operating heavy

machinery can be dangerous and ultimately fatal, so it's crucial to avoid sleep debt for, if anything, that reason alone (Importance).

The fourth- and arguably most obvious- reason for getting enough sleep is directly related to mood and activity. Anyone who doesn't get enough sleep is prone to being petulant, impatient, unable to focus, or just moody in general (Importance). One will find that, suddenly, an early morning pickup game of baseball will seem much less interesting if they're overtired.

The final two reasons are health-related. The first of the two is cardiovascular health. The Harvard Women's Health Watch says, "Some serious sleep disorders have been linked to hypertension, increased stress hormone levels, and irregular heartbeat." The second health-related issue pertinent to sleep disorders is disease. When someone doesn't get enough sleep, their immune system is greatly weakened, which reduces its ability to fight off sickness (Importance).

Before someone can fully begin to address their sleep deprivation issues, it's important to be familiar with all the different kinds of sleep disorders, their symptoms, and their emotional, physical, and psychological effects on the mind and body. Only then can one be able to narrow down the possibilities, discover what sleep disorder they suffer from, and find sufficient treatment.

One of the most common sleep disorders is insomnia, which is directly related to difficulty falling asleep and remaining so. Those who suffer from it usually display the following symptoms: Trouble getting to sleep, waking up multiple times during the night, waking up too early, or feeling tired after waking up. Insomnia exists in two forms: Primary and secondary. The difference between the two is that primary insomnia is

unrelated to any other health issues, whereas secondary insomnia usually has something to do with other health conditions such as asthma, cancer, or clinical depression (Insomnia). It can be caused by high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, or just routine stress.

Excessive Daytime Sleepiness (EDS) is, simply, a condition in which people have difficulty staying awake during the day. Symptoms include having a strong desire to sleep or nap, general lack of energy, and drowsiness after a solid night's sleep. Getting EDS for any reason can result in further health issues, as too much sleep is detrimental (daytimesleep.org).

Some people suffer from sleep rhythm problems, also known as circadian rhythm sleep disorders. These illnesses are related to those who have problems keeping a regular sleep schedule. Symptoms are more or less a combination of those of EDS and insomnia. Someone with a circadian rhythm sleep disorder may feel urges to sleep during the day, but may be unable to sleep during the evenings. This usually begins during adolescence and continues through adulthood and can be treated with light therapy (Circadian).

There are a number of sleep-disruptive disorders that fall under the general category of parasomnias. Some disorders that fall under this category are nightmares (frightening dreams), sleepwalking (unconsciously walking, talking, or doing other complex behaviors), sleep terror disorder (caused by sudden arousal), and restless leg syndrome (a prickling or needle-like feeling in the legs) (Disorders).

Despite what some may think, the aforementioned sleep disorders are not just present in adults. In fact, many of them begin in early childhood or adolescence. Many kids suffer from these disorders and have to cope with the effects during school (and

sometimes at work for older teens). The kinds of disorders that are most common amongst children and adolescents are different parasomnias. For example, children 8-12 typically experience sleepwalking more often than adults, as the condition usually disappears during the beginning of adolescence (Dawson).

I wish I could somehow draw from some kind of personal experience to reinforce this information about sleep disorders, but I don't know or know of anyone who suffers from one. But I do know this: The steps that are taken to address sleep disorders are quite simple. Firstly, it's crucial to get informed. As soon as someone believes that they or a loved one is suffering from a sleep disorder, they should go online or visit a local healthcare provider to find a solution. Many of these sleep disorders can be fixed by adjusting eating habits, removing stress-inducing things from life, and maintaining a regular sleep schedule. More serious disorders can be fixed by therapy or prescribed medication. However, I'll say it again: The key here is to get informed. The more people know about sleep disorders, the sooner they can be addressed and dealt with.

Works Cited

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