



UNITED  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

# Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

March 2011

## Sleep Your Way to Better Mental Health It's as Important as a Healthy Diet and Exercise

**Snooze. Slumber. Hit the hay. Get forty winks.** It's not surprising how many terms we have for "sleep" since, if we want to be healthy, we should sleep about one-third of our lives. Sometimes sleep seems like a waste of time, but a good night's sleep is key to good physical and mental health.

Sleeping well makes us more likely to succeed at our day-to-day tasks and enjoy greater well-being. And poor sleep has been linked to:<sup>1</sup>

- Greater risk of depression and anxiety
- Increased risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer
- Impaired memory
- Reduced immune system functioning

- Weight gain and diabetes
- Greater likelihood of accidents

Sleep problems can take many forms, including too little sleep, too much sleep, or inadequate quality of sleep.

### The Connection between Insomnia and Stress

Nearly two-thirds of Americans say they lose sleep because of stress.<sup>1</sup> The insomnia can affect our success at work, our family life and our relationships.

People with bipolar disorder or depression may have trouble sleeping.<sup>2</sup> If you have one of these conditions, monitor your sleep

habits and talk to your doctor if you're not getting good sleep.

### Six Tips for Getting Better Sleep<sup>3</sup>

- Schedule your sleep. Set a regular bedtime and wake-up time.
- Avoid caffeine, including coffee and cola, starting six to eight hours before bedtime.
- Start relaxing two hours before bedtime. Wind down by taking a bath, reading or listening to music.
- Make your bedroom 100 percent geared for sleeping. Don't pay bills or work in bed, and make your bedroom pleasing

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## Are You Getting Enough Zzzzz's?

If you have trouble sleeping, you're not alone. According to a recent poll, nearly seven out of ten Americans say they experience frequent sleep problems.<sup>5</sup> Answer the questions below,<sup>6</sup> and if you answer "yes" to at least one of them, talk to your doctor or contact us.

- Most adults should get seven to nine hours of sleep a night.<sup>1</sup> Are you getting less than that?
- Are you often tired?
- Do you use caffeine to get through the day?
- Do you have difficulty falling asleep? Or staying asleep?
- Do you wake up feeling tired?
- Do you get sleepy when you drive or watch TV?
- Have people told you that you snore?

### Upcoming Articles

April 2011

Autism:  
What You Need to Know

May 2011

Bipolar Disorder:  
What You Need to Know

and comfortable.

- Exercise regularly, but not right before bed! Working out will help make you ready to sleep when it's time.
- Try an over-the-counter sleep aid for a few days. Check with your doctor first to make sure it's safe for you, follow the instructions carefully, and work on the other tips at the same time.

If these activities don't solve your insomnia, or if you feel tired even when you get enough sleep, see your doctor, especially if you have trouble more than three

nights a week for a month.<sup>1</sup> Your doctor will check for health problems that may be interfering with your sleep. He or she might prescribe a sleep medication and/or a behavioral program to help with your stress. You may be referred to a sleep specialist.

### **Sleep Disorders**

Many sleep disorders have been identified and named. Two of the most common are:

- **Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)** causes snoring, gaps in breathing and gasping for breath when you sleep. This

condition is also linked to depression.<sup>4</sup>

- **Restless leg syndrome** causes sudden urges to move your body, walk or kick. Your legs may feel "active" at night, and you may experience other strange feelings in your legs.

If you have one of these disorders, you may be referred for a sleep study, also known as a polysomnogram. You'll spend a night in a sleep facility where your biological functions are recorded while you sleep. After a diagnosis is made, you may be given

medication, oxygen or a device called continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy that keeps your air passages open during sleep.

Getting enough sleep isn't always easy. But UBH is here to help you. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges (see Resources).

## **Dreams Work While You Sleep**

When we remember them, our dreams can seem bizarre – with impossible physical feats, disconnected people and sudden changes in place. We wake up and think, "What was that about?"

For thousands of years humans have been fascinated with dreams, but we still don't know as much as we'd like about them. We do know that the vast majority of humans dream every night.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes dreams can be traced to our recent activities, as though our

minds are trying to organize our experiences. Some people repeat the same themes over and over in their dreams, and many of us share the same themes – such as flying like a bird or forgetting to attend a class until the final exam.

In 1953, the phenomenon of rapid eye movement (REM) was discovered. People who were awakened during REM sleep usually remembered vivid dreams, but when awakened during non-REM sleep, they seldom remembered dreaming. This

proved that our brains are active during sleep.<sup>5</sup>

Researchers also discovered that if they waked people just as they began dreaming, these people exhibited increased tension, anxiety and irritability; along with difficulty concentrating.

These results indicate that dreaming is important, and that dream deprivation can have serious consequences.<sup>5</sup>

We still don't know exactly why we dream, but we do know that our brains are, and should be, working while we sleep.

## **Resources**

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

- Use the search phrase "needing sleep" for more information about the importance of sleep and ideas for overcoming insomnia.

The information, advice, treatments and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered under your benefit plan. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services. UBH does not recommend or endorse any treatment, medication, or suggested approach, specific or otherwise. Consult with your clinician, physician or mental health care provider for specific health care needs, treatment or medications.

1 Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association). "Are You Feeling Stressed Out." <http://www.nmha.org/go/mhm/2009/stress>. Accessed July 21, 2010.

2 Dawson, Millie. "The Quest for Sleep." *bp Magazine*, Spring 2006.

3 National Sleep Foundation. "Healthy Sleep Tips." <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/healthy-sleep-tips>. Accessed August 24, 2010.

4 National Sleep Foundation. "Depression and Sleep." <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/depression-and-sleep>. Accessed July 24, 2010.

5 National Sleep Foundation. "In Your Dreams." <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/hot-topics/your-dreams>. Accessed July 24, 2010.

6 National Sleep Foundation. "Sleep Studies." <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/sleep-studies>. Accessed July 24 2010.