

SLEEPING BETTER, Part 1  
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May 24, 2016

Adequate, good quality sleep is vital to good health. Without it, risks go up for cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, cancer, many inflammatory disorders, anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder. The impairment of driving while sleep deprived can be equal to 1 to 2 drinks of alcohol, texting or talking on the phone. Sadly, average sleep time is less than 7 hrs per night, when optimal is 8-9 hrs.

I will first review some of the things that interfere with good sleep and things that can be done to improve sleep, and then look at the larger concept of sleep, dreams, and waking as a whole tapestry in the context of the sleep dysfunction in our culture, as portrayed by Dr. Rubin Naimin in his book, Healing Night.

The following factors cause sleep problems: Diseases, prescription and non-prescription drugs, over-stimulation, chronic stress, exhaustion, inactivity, television at night, eating too late, noise and street lights during the night, uncomfortable bed, lack of exposure to bright light in the daytime, and possibly electromagnetic fields in the bedroom. Shift work makes it very difficult to have good sleep cycles, and swing shifts are the worst thing for sleep and probably even for general health.

Some of the diseases and health conditions are: sleep-disordered breathing such as sleep apnea and snoring, asthma, frequent urination from prostate problems or heart failure, restless leg syndrome, arthritis, inflamed muscles or tendons, thyroid conditions, allergies, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) from diabetes or from adrenal insufficiency, increased cortisol at night, menopausal hot flashes, anxiety, bipolar disorder, acid reflux, and neurological disorders such as Parkinson's or Multiple Sclerosis.

Some of the drugs causing problems are alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, cocaine, decongestants, amphetamines, diuretics, antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, sleep medications, and a variety of other prescription drugs. Caffeine's metabolites can extend into the night, especially if more than a small amount is consumed in the morning.

First in importance is correcting the causes. For snoring and other obstructive breathing: Refer to my article on Oral System Biology regarding oral devices. Losing weight to relieve the pressure on the throat could help. Myofunctional speech therapy has been helpful. Learning to play a wind instrument, especially the didgeridoo, has been found to be beneficial. Overnight oximetry can measure oxygen deprivation during sleep and suggest sleep apnea. A formal sleep study can determine if a CPAP machine is needed. Food allergies can cause symptoms at night, long after eating, and can be tested. Saliva tests are available to check for elevated nighttime cortisol. Natural treatments are available for elevated cortisol, hypoglycemia, restless leg syndrome, other neurological or endocrine conditions, and for reflux.

Sleep schedule is vital. Exposure to daylight outdoors in early AM helps set the awake/sleep cycle in a regular rhythm. Exercise during the day helps prepare the body for nighttime drowsiness. Going to bed at a regular time and getting up at a regular time also helps to maintain that rhythm. A cool, dark, bedroom environment is very important. Some people require wearing a blindfold or making complete darkness in the bedroom, covering clocks and other appliances that may have lights, and minimizing electromagnetic fields by keeping electrical appliances far from the bed. Mattresses should not sag, but should be soft on the surface. Pets in the bedroom often are disruptive of sleep. Eliminating snoring for the partner helps two people's sleep. If sounds come from other rooms, earplugs can be used. It is best not to have a loud alarm clock, if it can be adjusted to gradually increase the sound or make pleasant sounds. The bedroom should be reserved only for sleeping, sex, meditation and prayers. (No T.V., computers, tablets, phones, or books, especially "page-turning" novels). Doing things in the bed other than sleep conditions the brain to expect something other than sleep. Winding down one hour before bedtime with a warm bath, journal writing, prayer, meditation, or reading spiritual writings, poetry, or boring subjects helps to prepare the brain for sleep. Blue light blocking glasses can be worn two hrs before bed to reduce the light stimulating the brain and the shutting off of melatonin production. Large meals or exercise close to bedtime should be avoided. For being awake at 2 AM, meditating or praying with the lights out is an option until sleep returns. Sitting in a chair until "nodding off" would be better than "tossing and turning" in the bed. Getting out of bed and reading is an option for someone too restless to meditate, but turning on a light stops the melatonin production for the rest of the night. A supplement of melatonin 1-3mg could be taken at that time. Don't continue to look at the clock after you've checked it one time, and if you can avoid entirely looking at the clock, all the better.

Good nutrition is always beneficial. Junk food disrupts hormone function, causes inflammation and toxic overload, all of which disrupt good sleep.

Supplements can help. Tryptophan 500 to 1000 mg, chelated magnesium 400mg, and several herbs such as valerian, hops, skullcap, passion flower, kava, chamomile, catnip, lemon balm, and ashwaganda can be used separately or in combination at bedtime or in the middle of the night. Approx. 10% of people can get stimulated from valerian, so it is good to try it by itself before using it in combination. Some of the herbal nerviness can be taken regularly in the daytime as well as at night, to calm the whole 24 hour period. A calmer day results in a calmer night. Aromatherapy with lavender oil on the pillow or on the upper lip can calm the nervous system. Magnesium can also be helpful for restless leg syndrome. For RLS, check iron level – ferritin should be above 60. Phosphorylated serine at bedtime can help reduce elevated cortisol. Oat milky seed is nourishing to the nervous system if used over a long period of time to help it to become more resilient and calm. The herbal adaptogens help the whole body to adapt to stressful situations better and can therefore help the nervous system to be calmer and reduce the hyper-aroused immune system and the resulting heat and inflammation that interfere with sleep. Insomnia is a condition of hyper-arousal and increased metabolic rate both during waking and sleeping. (JAMA Feb20, 2013 Vol 309 #7 p.707) Omega 3 fatty acids help to reduce

inflammation and have been found to be helpful for sleep. Melatonin, extended release, at bedtime can help restore normal sleep cycles that have been disrupted by jet lag, shift work, or excess light in evening or light in the bedroom at night. It does not by itself induce drowsiness unless other conditions are conducive to sleep. Melatonin helps restore REM and dreaming and protects against cancer and other diseases. Dreaming and REM sleep are disrupted by alcohol, caffeine, sleeping pills, and antidepressant medications. Sleep medications may result in unconsciousness and amnesia, but that does not equal sleep. Rates of cancer were increased by 30% and overall mortality increased by 300% for people who took Rx sleeping pills, regardless of the baseline condition of health or illness. Similar findings were corroborated by 22 studies. (Reported in British Medical Journal Open 2012;2:e 000850)

Rubin Naimin, Ph. D., presents a deeply insightful comprehensive coverage of psychological, cultural, and lifestyle disruptions to healthful sleep and what we can do about it, in his book, Healing Night. Dr. Naimin is a clinical psychologist specializing in integrative sleep and dream medicine, assistant professor at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. His website is [www.drnaimin.com](http://www.drnaimin.com).

Dr. Naimin states that we, as a culture, have developed psycho-spiritual “night-blindness.” Over the past century our civilized nights have become shorter due to artificial illumination, and in our driven, wakefulness-addicted lives, we have lost a regard for dusk, dawn, and night. “Daylight has been deified and darkness demonized... even as adults, we are afraid of the dark.” We deny aspects of the metaphorical darkness of our own lives and project it onto the darkness of night. To understand sleep better, we need to see its role in the integration of the larger context of sleeping, dreaming, and waking. We cannot heal our sleep and dream disorder without seeing darkness as a healing retreat.

In 1950, 70% of rural households did not have electric lighting. In times past most people lived in rural areas. We experienced bright light outdoors in the day. As daylight gradually receded, the winds would quiet, crickets and night birds would begin to chirp, as all things darkened, cooled, and slowed. Evening activities in a gentler, dimmer light were more relaxing and restful. People made a slow and easy transition toward sleep. Religious and folk traditions provided storytelling, prayers, and Bible reading. Bedtime occurred not too long after dark. Awakening to start the day came with the first morning light and the crowing of the rooster. Arousal was geared to the biological needs and rhythms of people and their animals, was often accompanied by prayer, meditation, and the setting of intentions for the new day. The big challenge now is to restore many of these rhythms of dusk, night, and dawn in our contemporary society.

Now excessive light exposure at night is linked to diabetes, cancer, immune system dysfunction, and damage to birds and plant life. Shorter sleep time is associated with obesity, cancer and cardiovascular disease. People watch TV an average of 4 hours per evening. In 2005 the National Sleep Foundation determined that 75% of U.S. adults had symptoms of sleep problems several nights per week, and insomnia was on the rise. In the past 3 decades in the U.S. people increased work time by one full month per year.

(My note – Larger numbers of working poor have to work more than one job at minimum wage, one paycheck away from homelessness, and those who are in the middle income level still work extra to acquire more stuff and seldom have real vacations). Not every society has to work so much as we do. In some European countries, people have much longer vacations and shorter workweeks, and they still enjoy a high standard of living. (See "Where to Invade Next", a documentary movie by Michael Moore.) Sleep has been traded off for productivity. I ask, are we willing to give up some of the sacred cow of productivity for better health and to allow the working poor to receive back more financial return for their productivity?

So we have made night like the day by extending light at night and by extending our focused thinking, problem solving, anxieties and worries of the day on into the nights' sleep. We expect to suddenly fall asleep without any transition, and then are surprised that we have a problem. In the morning we are shocked awake suddenly with the danger signal of an alarm, and we need caffeine to finish the transition to daytime. Then, being sleep deprived, we extend sleepiness into the day, seldom go outside to experience the brightness of daylight, cooped up in offices, classrooms, stores, restaurants, and factories, which have comparatively dim light in contrast to outdoor light. (The average American adult spends no more than one hour out of doors per day.) To substitute for the stimulation that daylight brings, we insert caffeine and sugar, which extend their stimulation into the night. All this interferes with the natural biologic circadian rhythms, so that our days are dulled and our nights are stimulated. This flat lining deprives us not only of sleeping, but also of having a vibrant day experience. "Half-awake in our sleep and half asleep in our waking, we are never completely at rest, and seldom fully conscious." We are a night-blind culture.

The goal of sleeping better could be restated as waking, sleeping, and dreaming better.

Organizations that try to improve sleep fail to acknowledge the meaning of night consciousness and night-mindedness. They try to treat our damaged nights with the light of ordinary waking understanding. "This is akin to trying to explore darkness with a flashlight. It is the night blind leading the night blind."

Night is the shadow of the earth. Most of us are not so much afraid of the dark itself, but what the darkness may reveal, our own shadow selves. The disowned aspects of our psychological selves, all that we deny, suppress, or project outward in our waking consciousness, emerges naturally at night.

My comments – To acknowledge our shadow selves means facing and working with suppressed and repressed feelings, accepting, experiencing, and releasing them, replacing negative thoughts with positive affirmations, etc. This may involve journaling, counseling, laughing, screaming, praying, meditating, and maybe getting professional help. If we've done our homework, our emotional housecleaning, if we have faced our shadows, then we won't have a heavy backlog that follows us into the night. Then we may welcome the darkness of night as a healing respite, and we'll have only the usual

things from the day that our dreams will work on to defrag and to organize. St. Paul said, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

Sleeping is like a little death, as we let go of ego consciousness and surrender to sleep and dreams. If we haven't made peace with the concept of death, that may also interfere with our sleep. It can be helpful to surrender to a feeling of being rocked to sleep by God, or to fall asleep in the arms of Jesus, or for someone who doesn't have a concept of a personal God, surrendering to the Unity Consciousness of All That Is, or to a Higher Power. It is important to note the mythology of the tomb and the womb, both places of incubation before birth or rebirth. A seed falls into the ground as the old plant dies, and the seed has to be in darkness and coolness before it germinates and grows toward the light. If we close our eyes in the purity of darkness and silence to pray or to meditate, then why not welcome darkness in sleep?

It is important to recognize that light and shadow are equally valid as natural parts of the rhythm of life. From the Ecclesiastes, a season and a time for every purpose, to the Ying and Yang, the polarities that become each other in turn, winter and summer, warm and cold, etc.

There may be a bias toward light over darkness in our psychology because much of spiritual terminology uses Light as a metaphor for spiritual growth, wisdom, or Divinity. I think we need to discern this as "the Light that casts no shadow, a pure light that encompasses and permeates all of life, not to be seen as the polar opposite of any thing. The light seen on the material plane always has its natural counterpart of darkness, and each one is equally valid.

The light over dark bias in our culture also promotes racism, and historically people favored bleached flour, white bread, white sugar, and white rice over dark, as if that gave a higher social and economic status, and yet we find now that those things have adverse health consequences, that the dark food is better. Also the darker the pigment in vegetables and fruit, the more flavinoids, flavonols, flavones, anthocyanins, and polyphenols they have. The plants have developed these compounds to protect themselves against damage from ultraviolet light of the sun, whose light they need for photosynthesis. These substances have powerful antioxidant support when we consume them, to protect against much chronic illness. What is not commonly known is that pigment in the skin also confers protection against infection and inflammation as well as against sun damage. So we need to recognize that light and dark, light and shadow, day and night, all need to be in balance, and one is equally as valid as the other.

Nature is full of rhythms, which we override at our peril. The Energizer Bunny seems to be the mascot or the guru of modern materialistic culture, symbolizing an incessant, relentless, driven activity like an addiction, overriding the natural rhythms. This hyper-arousal is a major cause of insomnia, with is more of a waking disorder than a sleep disorder. It brings over-activation of the endocrine, immune, and nervous systems with rapid metabolic rates, elevated body temperature, and association with obsessive-

compulsive behavior, the hyper-arousal extending throughout the whole 24 hour period of time.

In the next installment of this topic next month, I will review Dr. Naimin's portrayal of the ultradian rhythms of our consciousness that often is overridden by our lifestyles, how these rhythms affect our days and nights, how to restore these rhythms. He covers napping, middle-of-the-night wakefulness, the importance of dusk, dawn, and dreaming in the whole spectrum of our day and night consciousness, and how waking, dreaming, and sleeping can be naturally woven together into an integrated whole, a most masterful presentation.