SLEEP DISORDERS

Sleep is essential for normal, healthy function. However, about 40 million people in the United States suffer from chronic sleep disorders each year, and another 20 million people suffer occasional sleep problems.

Sleep disorders are very expensive, costing the economy an estimated $100 million in lost productivity from increased absences and illnesses.

Types and Causes

There are more than 100 different sleep and wake disorders. Generally classified into four categories, sleep disorders include:

- *Trouble falling and staying asleep*, such as insomnia
- *Disturbed sleep*, such as sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome
- *Excessive sleep*, such as narcolepsy
- *Trouble sticking to a regular sleep schedule,* usually seen in travelers or nighttime workers

Sleep disorders are very common and can result from a number of causes, including stress, illness, diet, or medication. Other causes include genetics, night-shift work, blindness, mental illness, physical illness, and aging.

Diagnosis

As with other neurological disorders, an accurate medical history is an essential component of a sleep disorder diagnosis. People with sleep disorders should keep a daily log of activities and sleep, including both when going to sleep and time actually asleep. Behavior during sleep, such as snoring or frequent waking, should be reported to the doctor. Also it's important to mention any tobacco, alcohol, or other drug use to your doctor.

Treatment

Treatment for sleep disorders depends on the cause. If a cause has not been identified for a particular sleep disorder, improving sleep habits is the best way to overcome the disorder. Follow these tips for a good night's sleep:

- Set a schedule. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.
- Exercise daily, but not within a few hours of going to bed.
- Avoid caffeine, cigarettes, and alcohol within several hours of bedtime, all of which can cause sleep deprivation or missing an important stage of the sleep cycle.
- Try to enjoy a relaxing bedtime ritual every night before going to sleep, like taking a hot bath or reading a book.
- Try to wake up to the sun by opening curtains or shades and letting in the sunlight. Or, go outside briefly. The sun helps trigger and reset the biological clock, which is the part of the brain that indicates both sleepiness and when it is time to wake up.
- Before going to bed, make sure that the room is not too hot or too cold.

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