



NO SNOOZE, YOU LOSE

In today's hectic world, it can be easy to dismiss the importance of a good night's sleep—but doing so wreaks havoc on our health. Here's why it's crucial to understand the necessity of sleep.

BY DONNA ZUCKER

“Sleep is a vital component of our health,” says Dr. Fulvia Milite, director of sleep medicine at White Plains Hospital. “It directly or indirectly affects all the systems in our body and serves to restore and repair the body and mind.”

For health-conscious adults, it is important to note that sleep is not merely a luxury, nor an area of life that can be compromised or ignored. Sleep deficiency can cause or lead to physical and psychological health problems. Research has shown a correlation between lack of sleep and chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer. Sleep deficiency can also exacerbate existing health issues and alter

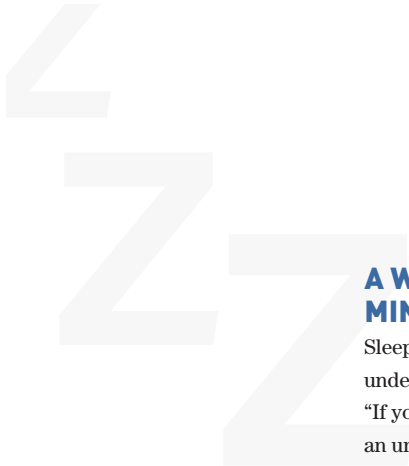


Fulvia Milite, MD
Director of Sleep
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the immune system—and has been connected to obesity and weight gain.

“Without proper sleep, you may have a high level of appetite hormones, which cause an increase in hunger and a craving for carbohydrates,” Dr. Milite explains. Weight gain, she says, can become a byproduct of an energy deficiency—if you are tired, you will not be exercising.

Emotional and psychological problems, including depression, irritability, moodiness, and poor emotional regulation and control, are exacerbated by sleep deficiencies. Sleep loss can also negatively impact memory, concentration, and learning and cause difficulty performing tasks at home, school, and work.



A WINDOW TO THE MIND AND BODY

Sleep is not only about prevention—it may be a key to understanding your overall health. Dr. Milite explains, “If you are having problems with sleep, it can indicate an underlying medical problem or be the result of bad habits at home.” Dr. Milite notes that unhealthy habits are very common today: lack of exercise, irregular sleep schedules, excessive caffeine intake, eating meals too close to bedtime, and the use of electronic devices, such as phones, tablets, or televisions in bed. All of these lifestyle factors can contribute to sleep deficiency.

There are often physical issues at the root of the most common sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, periodic limb movement disorder, and insomnia. Sleep apnea is a potentially life-threatening condition, in which the throat closes or the airway collapses, resulting in lower levels of oxygen to the brain. “Without treatment, sleep apnea can lead to heart failure, arrhythmia, and high blood pressure,” says Dr. Milite. About 25 million Americans have sleep apnea, with 80 percent of them being undiagnosed.

Periodic limb movement disorder is characterized by repetitive episodes of brief muscle twitches or jerking motions. The underlying cause of this sleep disorder may be the result of iron deficiency or electrolyte abnormalities. On rare occasions, it may indicate kidney disease or anemia.

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—Dr. Fulvia Milite



Insomnia—or trouble falling or staying asleep—can be caused by medical conditions such as gastrointestinal issues, arthritis, asthma, and hyperthyroidism.

Sleep disruptions may also indicate potential psychological issues, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression. “Depression is strongly related to sleep,” notes Dr. Milite. “People who are depressed may not be able to sleep, and people who are unable to sleep may become depressed. It is a never-ending whirlpool that may not end without treatment for the depression.”

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Sleep disorders not only impact the brain and body but can have serious long-term consequences. There are nearly 85 known sleep disorders, with one in three people having one, yet 95 percent of these disorders are undiagnosed and untreated.

It is essential to get a proper diagnosis to determine the underlying cause of sleep disorders, as well as the course of treatment. Dr. Milite recommends seeking medical attention if snoring or unusual nighttime behavior is observed, such as cold sweats in the middle of the night, repetitive nocturnal behavior, or nightmares that disrupt sleep.

Other causes for concern are waking up feeling non-refreshed, with shortness of breath or headaches, and sleeping involuntarily during the day. Medical issues such as diabetes and hypertension, as well as panic attacks, depression, and even glaucoma, coupled with snoring and observed breathing pauses during sleep, should be evaluated to determine if there is a potential pathological reason for sleep disruptions.

THE SLEEP CENTER AT WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL

Opened in June 2019, the Sleep Center is a newly renovated, modern facility providing consultation for the diagnosis and management of sleep disorders. The center offers state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, with comfortable private rooms and comprehensive care from experienced sleep technicians and board-certified sleep specialists.

“Now that the Sleep Center is available at White Plains Hospital,” says Dr. Milite, “Patients have access to and can be treated by hospital specialists, including those from the cardiology, pulmonary, ENT, psychiatry, neurology, and pediatric departments.” The Center conducts overnight sleep and home sleep studies, as

well as daytime-nap studies for evidence of issues such as narcolepsy and other underlying medical issues and concerns.

As the medical director, Dr. Milite reviews sleep studies and manages the center. She also provides consultations with adult patients. “I do a full review of sleep complaints and habits to diagnose and address all issues that may be disrupting sleep,” she explains.

HEALTHY SLEEP, HEALTHY LIFE

It is estimated that one-third of adults get less than the recommended amount of sleep. For most adults to feel rested and function well during the day, they need about seven to eight hours, with women needing an additional 20 to 30 minutes more per night than men.

If you are not getting enough sleep, it can lead to sleep deprivation, which Dr. Milite defines as inconsistent sleep of less than six hours at night, continuing for a sustained period of time. As stated, sleep deprivation can lead to considerable health risks. Dr. Milite notes that while the risks are generally the same for adults, there are exceptions: medical issues are more common with age and can interfere with sleep. And insomnia can become problematic for postmenopausal women.

There are ways to be proactive. Dr. Milite recommends daily cardiovascular exercise to get your heart rate up. (Speak with a medical professional to determine the type of workout your body can tolerate and what is considered healthy for you, she advises.)

Another way to improve sleep is eating certain foods, particularly those high in tryptophan, such as turkey. A handful of almonds and chamomile tea may also have beneficial effects. Avoiding certain substances will also help. The consumption of alcohol within two to three hours of bedtime, for instance, may help you fall asleep but can wake you up in the second half of the night.

“Getting a good night’s sleep and having healthy habits are as important as any other principal habits we keep for our health,” Dr. Milite stresses. “Sleep should be treated with respect.” •



What to Expect at White Plains Hospital’s Sleep Center

Dr. Fulvia Milite breaks down a typical visit:

“We do a complete history and physical. It is a thorough investigation to uncover any reasons you may have a sleep disorder. We consider pulmonary and neurological issues, obesity, depression—anything that would lead us to think there is a pathological reason why you may be waking up at night and making it harder to have a constructive life during the day.

If there are no risk factors for a sleep breathing disorder, periodic limb movements, nighttime seizures, or parasomnias, then we research other potential reasons that your sleep is disturbed. For example, medical issues like lung disease, pain syndromes, or menopausal symptoms can affect sleep. In

addition, depression and anxiety are intimately related to sleep quality. We ask patients: Do you experience anxiety or panic attacks during the day? Is there any trauma in your past or recent stressors, such as the loss of employment or the death of a close family member or friend? All of these issues may cause sleep disturbances.

We will also investigate all medications prescribed by a doctor to check if that is the cause for lack of sleep. We then look into habits and environment during a 24-hour cycle, focusing on what is happening in your life from the moment you get into bed at night until the moment you get into bed the next day. We consider what you eat and when you eat, alcohol in-



take, and bedtime routines. We check that you are on a healthy sleep schedule at night and during the day.

The goal is to collect data from the history and physical, as well as any sleep studies, to properly diagnose and treat disorders and find solutions.”