Insomnia Essay, Research Paper

Sleep! Sleep! Sleep! What exactly is sleep and why do we need it? Sleep is the state of partial or full unconsciousness by which the body restores itself. Without sleep, it would be impossible to survive. The body needs time to rejuvenate its system functions, and to temporarily shut down and rest. An appropriate amount of sleep for a young-adult is around 8 or 9 hours. The inability to fall asleep or to sleep long enough to feel rested is insomnia, which affects about 30 million people in the U.S. annually. (Encarta, 1998)

Sleeplessness is second only to colds, as our most reported medical complaint in the United States. (Tizon, 1991) It can be brought on by physical problems such as pain from an injury, or mental problems such as depression. Anxiety over important affairs such as a job interview, a wedding, or an exam can also cause insomnia. If it usually takes more than thirty minutes to fall asleep or you are up in the middle of the night for at least thirty minutes, you may have insomnia.

There are a lot of accomplished people who claim not to get a lot of sleep. Tonight Show host, Jay Leno, only gets four hours of sleep a night. The same goes for Martha Stewart. Leonard da Vinci only got 90 minutes of sleep a day. (Hunter, 2000) It is presumed that he took a fifteen-minute nap every four hours. This shows how being productive when you can t sleep, is a good decision. Insomniacs need to realize that their problem isn t rare and that they aren t alone.

Causes of the Condition

Medication side affects (amphetamines, decongestants, and antihistamines)

Caffeine, nicotine, alcohol

Drug abuse

Depression, stress, anxiety

Poor sleep surroundings

Chronic pain, chronic illness

Daytime napping, poor sleep habits (Reyes, 2000)

Time Pressure

Environmental Noise

Jet lag

Kidney disease, heart failure,

Asthma

Sleep apnea (Sleepnet, 2000)

Narcolepsy

Nocturnal Myoclonus (Weck, 1989)

Lack of exercise

Shift work

Being too hot or cold (Pritchet, 1997)

Three basic types of insomnia

Transient insomnia – lasts for a few nights.

Short-term insomnia – about three weeks of poor sleep.

Chronic insomnia – consistent unsatisfying sleep that lasts for over a month.

Transient and short-term insomniacs are usually having problems due to stress, unfamiliar noises, irregular sleep patterns, or medication side effects. Sometimes, transient insomniacs don t even need treatment. The biological clock will usually get back to normal on its own. If the area they are trying to sleep in is unusual, and there are disrupting noises or smells, then the person needs to either find a new place to sleep or fix the problem. If their problem is due to a certain medication they are taking, then it must be replaced or given in lower doses. Stress can be treated with drugs and/or counseling. Counseling can help, but stress sometimes just needs to run its course. (Weck, 1989) Chronic insomnia is much more serious! About 60% of all cases of chronic insomnia stem from mental or physical ailments. These include depression, sleep apnea, and periodic limb movements. (Lamberg, 1990) If the insomniac doesn t have any ailments then it could be caused by persistent fretting. The more they worry, the more they toss and turn. The worse they sleep, the more they worry.

Chronic insomnia can actually be fatal. It is also hereditary. In Bologna, Italy, 14 members of a family have died as a result of chronic insomnia since 1922. The last victim of the family died in 1986, a 53-year-old man who went without sleep for nine months. Insomnia can also cause fatalities indirectly. In two studies of insomnia victims, one group was found to have a higher rate of traffic accidents and another performed much below average on driving tests. (Weck, 1989)

Symptoms of Insomnia

Sleepiness

Anxiety

Impaired concentration

Impaired memory

Irritability

Lack of energy (Sleepnet, 2000)

Insomnia is not always detectable by others, and is often ignored by victims. Insomniacs can sometimes be a danger to society. Automobile drivers with insomnia have a higher rate of traffic accidents. It is also hard for them to keep a job. Their reflexes are slower, they may miss red lights and present other driving dangers. Inattentive, they may make frequent mistakes and appear lazy and indifferent, causing employers to fire them. (Weck, 1989)

How to treat insomnia

Treatment for insomnia consists of good sleeping habits, counseling, relaxation techniques, sleep restriction, and sleeping pills. If the victim is not able to reestablish a sleeping pattern naturally, then a medical evaluation is needed. The evaluation should help figure out the cause of insomnia.

Since many people with insomnia suffer from stress, anxiety, or depression, counseling is often the best treatment. The counselor can often find the problem and advise you on how to cope with it. (Pritchet, 1997)

Relaxation techniques help relax your muscles and free your mind of worries, thus allowing you to get a good night of sleep. They help you to get rid of anxiety and body tension.

Attempting to get sleep by spending more time in bed is not advisable. If sleep does not occur after about 30 minutes, then you should get up and do something. Then get up at your regular hour. (Hunter, 1993) It is also a good idea to have the clock out of the sleeper s sight, like under the bed or turned against the wall. Insomniacs are often clock-watchers, and it s a bad idea to look at the clock if you wake up during the night. People sleep better without time pressure. (Lamberg, 1990) The room in which you sleep should be free of all distractions. I know people who have a fax machine at the foot of their bed with a little bleeper so they can get up in the middle of the night to read their faxes, the pressure to lead a 24-hour life is getting worse. (Hunter, 2000) With distractions like that, it is very difficult to get adequate sleep.

Doctors are skeptical on the use of sleeping pills. Sleeping pills not only lose their effectiveness after 4 to 6 months but also may disturb your sleeping pattern and thus contribute to insomnia. (Larson, 1996) There are many new products on the market that should be given a try, before getting prescription sleeping pills though. Such as: Tylenol P.M., Alluna, and Sleepinol.

Long-term affects of insomnia

Less work productivity

More accidents

Low concentration

Short and long-term memory problems

Irritability

Insomnia makes it really hard to keep family relationships. Many people do not understand what the victim is going through.

Conclusion

There are many diseases and problems that face our society. Insomnia is one of the most common, and is generally possible to treat. Insomnia is often a symptom of another disorder too. Whether it be through mental or physical treatment, it can be overridden. The problem simply cannot be avoided and should be treated for. Even if insomnia is short-term, treatment is essential. Short-term insomnia leads to chronic insomnia. The earlier you treat the problem, the more curable it is.

Sleep needs to be an enjoyment and a remedy! Especially since we spend a third of our life doing it.