



Australian Traditional-
Medicine Society Ltd

Poor Sleep Increases Alzheimer's Risk

The inability to sleep through the night is linked with an increased risk for the preclinical form of Alzheimer's disease, according to a new studyⁱ from the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis that involved 145 people with normal brain function aged 45 to 75. Participants who were the least efficient sleepers were five times more likely to have preclinical Alzheimer's disease.

However, reaching for prescription sleeping drugs is not the answer, as a 2012 studyⁱⁱ of 1063 men and women, conducted by academics from Harvard University and the University of Bordeaux in France, revealed that people who start taking benzodiazepine drugs have a 50 per cent increased risk of developing dementia within 15 years.

Fundamental for Good Health

Sound sleep is fundamental for good health, as research repeatedly shows. One piece of information to emergeⁱⁱⁱ is that people who regularly sleep for fewer than six hours – and more than nine hours – are more likely to die from all causes.

“While there are a number of strategies to help you obtain the optimal six to eight hours sleep, the first thing to look at is the quality of your diet, as clinical experience reveals nutritional deficiencies to be a consistent factor in chronic insomnia,” says president of the Australian Traditional-Medicine Society (ATMS), Sandi Rogers ED.D. N.D.

These deficiencies relate mainly to the B-group vitamins; vitamin C; vitamin D; and the minerals calcium, magnesium, manganese and potassium, Dr Rogers explains. “As an example, stress leads to a reduction in the B-complex vitamins. As B-vitamins are anti-anxiety nutrients, the result can be depression and insomnia.”

Eating an abundance of unprocessed plant foods: vegetables and fruits; legumes; whole grains; and nuts and seeds will help ensure you obtain these nutrients.

Sleep Hygiene

Good sleep hygiene is another factor, and Dr Rogers shares the following strategies:

- Establish and stick to regular sleep habits so that you go to bed and wake up at approximately the same time every day, including weekends.
- If you're a light sleeper, go to bed only when you are truly sleepy. Spending less time in bed may produce a deeper, more restful sleep.
- Skip the daytime naps.
- Put away your work at least an hour before bedtime.
- Set aside time – ideally early in the evening – for planning, preparing to-do lists, thinking – and even for worrying, so that you are less likely to toss and turn at night.
- If you tend to brood over problems to the point where they affect your sleep, learn to switch off when you get into bed. Snap your problem shut just as if you were closing a book. Your subconscious will take over processing the problem, and possibly present you with an answer in the morning.
- Avoid strenuous workouts right before bedtime as they can disrupt sleep.
- Ensure your pillow and bed are comfortable and the mattress is in good condition.
- Choose nightwear that does not restrict you.
- If you fear oversleeping when you have an early start, set two alarms, ideally one not dependent on electricity (your mobile) in case there's a power cut.

- Be aware that some medical conditions and certain prescription medications can interfere with sleep. A qualified natural therapist can help resolve this with appropriate herbs or nutrients.
- When a situation causing insomnia is resolved; the worry about not sleeping can remain, causing the insomnia to continue. Cognitive therapy that addresses this anxiety sleeping can be helpful.

And some extra advice for shift workers, who face additional sleep challenges:

- Aim to sleep before work rather than earlier in the day – just as you do in a normal nine-to-five situation. If this is not possible, take a nap before work.
- Keep regular hours by going to bed and getting up at the same time on each shift.
- Ensure your bedroom is comfortable, dark, and the right temperature.
- Make it clear to family, friends and neighbours that you are not to be disturbed.
- Put a ‘daytime sleeper’ sign on the front door.
- Block out noise with attenuated earplugs.
- Unplug the landline and switch off the mobile so calls go straight to the voicemail.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine for at least three hours before bed.
- Avoid eating a big meal before bed so digestion won’t interfere with sleep. By the same token, don’t go to bed hungry as hunger pangs may keep sleep at bay.
- Go easy on fluids.

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ⁱ <http://archneur.jamanetwork.com/Mobile/article.aspx?articleid=1663363>

ⁱⁱ www.bmj.com/content/345/bmj.e6231

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.journalsleep.org/viewabstract.aspx?pid=27780>

Notes to Editors:

1. The Australian Traditional-Medicine Society (ATMS) is Australia's largest professional body for qualified natural-medicine practitioners: its 12,000 members from 26 modalities represent more than two-thirds of natural therapists in Australia. Members must meet minimum education standards, work to a strict code of ethics and comply with requirements such as continuing professional development.
2. The ATMS was formed in 1984 as an incorporated not-for-profit company with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).
3. Interviews with the CEO of ATMS, Trevor Le Breton, ATMS director Stephen Eddey are available upon request.
4. For more information about ATMS, please visit: www.atms.com.au