



Overview of Sleep Disorders

Everyone needs to sleep – it is vital and necessary to life. Sleep disorders can be chronic and complex problems that are often overlooked by doctors.

Poor sleep, regardless of the cause, may contribute to problems with:

- Health
- Finances
- Social well being

Over 50 million Americans suffer from a chronic sleep disorder:

- Insomnia
- Obstructive Sleep Apnea
- Restless Legs Syndrome
- Circadian Rhythm Sleep Disorders
- Inadequate Sleep

Insomnia is the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep. It is the most common sleep disorder in the US with an estimated 30-40% of the US population suffering from these symptoms within any given year. As we age, insomnia complaints become more common and women are more likely to suffer from insomnia than men. Insomnia complaints range from trouble falling or staying asleep, waking up frequently at night and waking early in the morning. Insomnia can be a primary sleep disorder or may be related to medications or other medical problems like chronic pain or cancer. It can also be a symptom of another sleep problem.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is the complete or partial stoppage of breathing during sleep. It is estimated that more than 18 million Americans have OSA and like insomnia, it is more common as we age. The most common symptoms of OSA are snoring and excessive sleepiness during the daytime. Other symptoms include morning headaches, perception of insomnia or poor sleep, frequent urination at night, daytime fatigue and restless sleep. Untreated OSA is associated with a number of other medical problems including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, memory difficulties, diabetes, glaucoma, erectile dysfunction and depression.

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) is an uncomfortable, unpleasant or creepy-crawly feeling in your legs which occurs while you are awake with the worse symptoms occurring at night and/or at rest. It typically results in an irresistible urge to move and walking around does temporarily relieve the symptoms. It can cause trouble with falling to sleep or staying asleep and can result in daytime sleepiness. RLS is associated with a variety of medical problems including iron deficiency anemia, kidney failure, pregnancy and chronic low back pain.

Circadian Rhythm Sleep Disorders includes problems with sleep related to changes in the body's internal sleep/wake clock (i.e. "the Circadian Rhythm"). There are two main types of CRSD: Advanced Sleep Phase Syndrome (ASPS) and Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS). ASPS is characterized by trouble staying awake in the early evening and waking up in the early morning and is more common in older adults. DSPS is characterized by the opposite – trouble falling asleep at a conventional, "normal" hour of the night and trouble waking up on time in the morning for school or work. DSPS is most common in teenagers and young adults. Individuals with either disorder are at risk of becoming sleep deprived.

Inadequate sleep is rampant in our 24 hour, nonstop society.

Myth: "I'm one of those people who only needs 5 hours of sleep."

Fact: Whether you are 20 or 90, you still need 7-8 hours of sleep/night for optimal daytime functioning. Getting less than 7-8 hours of sleep/night starts to create a "sleep debt" that must eventually be paid off.

Myth: "I do not need as much sleep as everybody else."

Fact: We do not "adapt" to getting less sleep. Our ability to function during the daytime may improve with effort (and temporarily with coffee) but our ability to perform consistently does not.

Sleeping 6 hours per night for 5 consecutive days is equal to 24 hours without ANY sleep. Insufficient sleep can result in memory problems, depression, a weakened immune system, and an increase in the perception of pain. It can also be deadly as it is estimated that more than 100,000 motor vehicle crashes/year are caused by sleepy drivers.