

Too Many Americans Lie Awake at Night

Most people spend a third of their life sleeping, but some struggle to get even four hours of slumber.

Sleeplessness is a problem for a significant number of Americans. It can be caused by many things, such as sleeping in an unfamiliar environment, hot weather and illness.

Business travelers, vacation travelers and shift workers coping with changes in bedtimes may find themselves tossing and turning frequently. Short periods of stress can also cause mild forms of insomnia.

Diet pills, which are often loaded with caffeine, can keep you from getting to sleep, as can taking daytime naps. In a few cases, leg cramps can interrupt a good night's sleep.

The elderly are often preoccupied with their lack of sleep. The normal 85-year-old spends about one-fifth of the night awake.

Furthermore, chronic nightmares may cause insomnia. Nightmares can occur after bad experiences or as a result of psychological troubles. Nightmares can also occur as side effects of taking or withdrawing from certain medications, such as sedatives.

Getting to Sleep

Experts offer several ways to treat insomnia.

First of all, people who have trouble sleeping should go to bed and arise at the same time every day—no staying up late or sleeping in.

This is the most crucial aspect of curing insomnia, experts say. Physicians also recommend removing all caffeine from the diet except, perhaps, the morning coffee. Regular exercise also helps improve sleep patterns.

Stretching may get rid of the problem; if you suffer from leg cramps at night, ask your physician to recommend a stretching exercise to do before going to bed.

In addition, some physicians swear by the time-honored tradition of drinking a glass of warm milk before bed.

Some cases of insomnia can be traced to underlying physical problems, and can be treated with medication. For instance, antidepressants almost always help people with depression overcome their sleeplessness.

However, barbiturates, once commonly used as sleeping pills, may do more harm than good. They are habit-forming, there is no good evidence that they work and they may actually disrupt normal sleep patterns.

While certain sleep aids can be bought over the counter, they do not restore the rapid eye movement (REM) stage of sleep, and are not considered by experts to be very helpful.

Many more efficient prescription sleeping aids have become available in the past few years. Ask your family pharmacist about the ones he or she feels work best.

Study Takes New Look At Women, The Effects Of Menopause And Heart Disease

Gerry Fallon barely stopped to think about her 60th birthday. After all, she was busy with her career, her children and her granddaughters.

She also barely thought about the occasional unusual feeling in her chest. It wasn't pain exactly, but a strange pressure she felt while walking on the beach or carrying something heavy.

She attributed it to a general feeling of lethargy, to the weight she gained when she quit smoking. But one night the pressure turned to pain—persistent, severe pain.

Gerry Fallon was having a heart attack.

Leading Cause of Death

Until recently, heart disease was thought to be a man's illness. The statistics show, however, that heart disease is the leading cause of death in women, just as it is in men.

Each year, about 500,000 American women have heart attacks. Nearly 245,000 die.

Doctors have some theories about women and heart disease. In a new clinical trial, the Heart and Estrogen-Progestin Study (HERS), physicians at 18 medical centers around the country are trying to determine whether hormone replacement therapy has an impact on postmenopausal women with heart disease. The findings could be significant for the 43 million women who are at or nearing menopause.

All 18 centers are recruiting post-menopausal women up to 80 years of age with heart disease to participate in the study.

Most of the research in heart disease in the past was done with male participants. Now researchers feel the differences between men and women warrant studies that focus

solely on women. Among those differences:

■ While men usually experience crushing chest pain, women are likely to feel a lingering pain, vague discomfort and nausea when having a heart attack.

■ Women are more likely to die from a first heart attack. Those who survive have a greater risk of a second heart attack than men.

■ Women who have bypass surgery are more likely to die from surgical complications.

■ Women are less likely to be given thrombolytic ("clot-busting") drugs.

Help for Women

HERS researchers hope to recruit at least 2,340 women for their tri-

als. The five-and-a-half year study will look at the relationship between hormone replacement therapy and recurrent heart attacks in women with heart disease. Women who participate will get free exams, including mammograms and blood tests.

Gerry Fallon was one of the first to join the trials.

As the HERS study and other research projects provide more facts, women will have more information to protect their health. By participating in HERS," she says, "I believe I'm doing something very constructive, something I can feel good about."

Anyone interested in participating should call 1-800-284-HERS.

National Flu Tracking System Arms Consumers Against Influenza Outbreak

A new influenza monitoring network could diminish the impact of this year's epidemic by alerting communities to flu activity before an outbreak hits.

The Flumadine FluAlert Center, developed to track influenza activity this season, will notify physicians and the public where type A influenza, the most severe form, has been confirmed.

The FluAlert Center consists of a panel of health providers, physicians and hospital groups that test for the influenza virus in 70 major geographic areas every week throughout the season.

Because influenza is caused by a virus, most people feel that nothing can be done to treat and prevent the illness. However, by recognizing the influenza alert quickly, physi-

cians and patients in afflicted cities may be able to prevent influenza before it occurs and lessen the severity of the illness through treatment with new antiviral medicines.

Vaccination is the primary method of preventing influenza infection; however, antivirals are also useful for preventing influenza A. When one medication was given to prevent infection during outbreaks, more than 90 percent of patients who took it in clinical studies did not develop influenza.

Preventing influenza A is especially important for persons with chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart, lung or kidney disease, adults and children with asthma, and everyone over the age of 65; these groups are most likely to develop serious complications from influenza.

Diabetes And The Kidneys

More than 200,000 Americans suffer from chronic kidney failure.

Kidney failure means that the kidneys have lost their ability to filter waste products and excess fluid from the blood. The individual then must have regular dialysis treatments or a kidney transplant in order to survive.

Approximately one-third of these patients lost their kidney function because of diabetes.

Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough insulin or cannot utilize the insulin properly. Since insulin regulates the metabolism of sugar, this can result in high levels of sugar in the blood.

Having too much sugar in the blood can damage the small blood vessels in the body. When the blood vessels in the kidneys are damaged, they can no longer filter the blood effectively. This condition is called diabetic nephropathy.

Not all diabetics develop kidney failure. About 30 to 40 percent of people with Type I (juvenile onset) diabetes and 10 to 30 percent of those with Type II (adult onset) diabetes will eventually have kidney failure.

Although it has not been rigorously proven, it is commonly ac-

cepted that controlling the blood sugar can prevent or delay the complications of diabetes including kidney failure. It is also important to keep blood pressure under control and to treat any urinary tract infections quickly.

The progression of diabetic nephropathy can be slowed if it is diagnosed early. One of the first signs is albuminuria, or protein in the urine. Once this is found, the doctor may prescribe a special blood pressure medicine and a low-protein diet in order to slow the advance of kidney damage. This should be done with the advice of a dietitian.

If you have diabetes, you should:

■ Maintain blood sugar and blood pressure as close to normal as possible.

■ Get regular medical check-ups, including blood and urine tests.

■ Know the warning signs of kidney disease—swelling of parts of the body; lower back pain; burning sensation during urination; bloody or coffee-colored urine; high blood pressure; change in the frequency of urination.

The American Kidney Fund can be reached at 1-800-638-8299.

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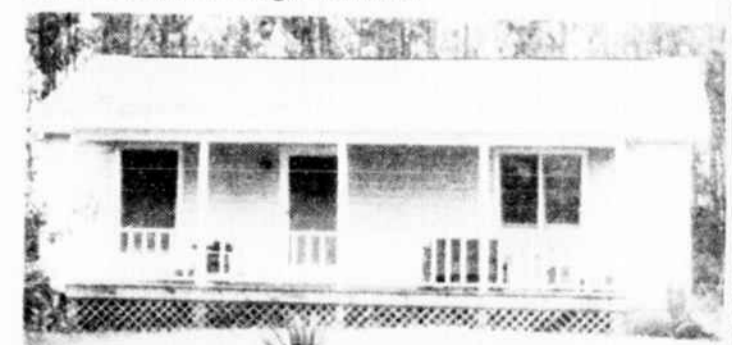
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