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Pseudo-insomnia troubles

Dr. J.E. Block

Since Daylight Savings Time was initiated last Sunday, I have been dwelling on sleep problems such as insomnia. Insomnia occurs in 40 percent of folks over the age of 60. True insomnia is difficulty falling asleep, getting up in the middle of the night and not easily falling back to sleep, or getting up extremely early in the morning. However, insomnia can be illusionary.

A recent Oxford study in the Journal of Sleep indicated some people do not have true insomnia, but think they do. This is related to the overestimation of sleep onset latency (time of closing the eyes until sleep), underestimation of total sleep time and a longer cognitive arousal (reporting having been awake just before they were awakened).

These give a distorted perception of sleep and the impression of insomnia where there may be none. In a sleep laboratory where there is monitoring of the brain waves, movement, temperature and respiratory rate disclosed a mismatch between perception and reality. The problem is, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. If one perceives they have poor sleep, they feel it. Hence, a negative vicious cycle ensues. Nothing fails like previous failure and a progressive sleep problem ensues. The increased anxiety and worry of not getting a good night's sleep gives more onset latency of sleep, the cognitive arousal phenomena and the perception of much less sleep than actuality.

How long should a person really sleep? Another study published in the Journal of Sleep from Japan showed those who slept between 6.5 and 7.5 hours on weekdays had the best survival rate The mortality risk of those who sleep more than 7.5 hours was greater than those who sleep 6.5!

Those who reported sleeping 8 hours had a greater mortality risk than those who slept 1 hour less. The Nurses Health Study and Cancer Prevention Study reached a very similar conclusion. These studies involved over a quarter of a million people.

Is a nap helpful? Although a study in Israel four years ago concluded that following a nap there was a slightly higher increase in having a cardiovascular event, just like "normally" occurs when one gets up from their night's sleep in the morning. If one were to take the nap, the best time would be to capitalize on the post lunch dip of core body temperature with an increased likelihood of easy sleep initiation. I feel that a nap is healthful. More on sleep next week.