

# Turning dreaming of sleep into the real deal

By Dr. Stephen Chung

- As of Friday, May 22, 2015

Hardworking Walla Wallans wake each morning to booming alarm clocks. Languishing in bed and imploring for more sleep, dream bubbles burst and work awaits.

May is Better Sleep Month, a time to address sleep problems plaguing 70 million Americans.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 25 percent of Americans aren't getting enough sleep, while 10 percent experience chronic insomnia, a disorder that disrupts sleep at least three nights a week and lasts for a minimum of three months.

Uninterrupted, high-quality sleep each night is crucial for proper functioning of our bodies and overall health. Unfortunately there are millions of people suffering from sleep disorders, such as snoring with upper airway resistance, sleep apnea, insomnia and restless leg syndrome with periodic limb movements. These disruptions can upset sleep architecture when your body is trying to rest and rejuvenate from the injuries and stress of the day.

There are serious health implications if you aren't getting your beauty rest, including heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, obesity, depression and forgetfulness.

## Common snoring or sleep apnea?

Snoring is caused by partial collapse of the airway during sleep which causes a vibrating, soft palate sometimes leading to loud grunts and snorts. It's estimated that 45 percent of adults snore occasionally and 25 percent snore habitually.

Snoring may be reduced by exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy diet, losing unhealthy weight and by avoiding alcohol.

Sleep apnea causes abnormal pauses in breathing while asleep, sometimes for several seconds or minutes. Signs of sleep apnea, which affects 18 million Americans, include snoring, consistent daytime fatigue, morning headache, frequent waking during the night to urinate, and sometimes feeling out of breath for unclear reasons.

Tips for preventing sleep apnea include quitting smoking, avoiding alcohol, not eating heavy meals before bed and using nasal sprays or breathing strips to open nasal passageways.

## Suffering from insomnia?

Insomnia, a common sleep disorder affecting millions of Americans, can be caused by a number of things, from arthritis and headaches to restless leg syndrome, overactive thyroid, stress, heartburn and, in women, the hormonal changes of going through menopause.

Signs of insomnia include lying awake for a long period of time, difficulty falling asleep, trouble

focusing, restless nights and rising too early in the morning, before your alarm goes off.

Lifestyle changes could also improve your sleep. Try reducing your caffeine or nicotine use to improve your sleep routine. However, some forms of insomnia might require medicines or therapy.

## **Ways to improve sleep**

Chronic sleep disorders and sleeplessness can be caused by changes in the environment, poor sleep habits, stress, depression and an inconsistent work schedule.

A few things Walla Wallans can do to try to catch some additional Zs at night:

- Get into a routine — Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day
- Watch what you consume — Avoid foods or beverages with caffeine or alcohol
- Eat at a reasonable time — Eat dinner at least 2-3 hours before bedtime
- Kick the habit — Quit smoking as soon as possible
- Stay calm and sleep on — Keep the bedroom dark, quiet and cool
- Power down your electronic devices — Light exposure from computers, TVs, tablets and cellphones affect brain chemistry and the ability to get to sleep

Sleep disorders are specific to the person and can harm your health, so know the warning signs. Talk with a sleep specialist and get back to sleep this month. Soon that bedside rooster won't seem so bad after a good night's rest.

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