

Urrakkam (Sleep)

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The article highlights the importance of sleep in maintaining health. Author generally follows Ashtangahridaya, though quotes Susruta also. Regularity, sleep hygiene are emphasized for habitualisation. Practical tips for the treatment for insomnia and hypersomnia are given. He is very critical about staying awake during nights for enjoying stage programmes. The language style is humorous and lucid

Most of the ailments that haunt us are due to our attitude. The disregard towards the simple factors of life is because of their ignorance regarding the value of life. No matter the adherence to wholesome diet, if the other activities not synchronous with it, we fall into a series of maladies. It is an undisputed fact that the conduct should be according to the geographical location and climate. The ancient science of *ayurveda* is more than a mere text, classifying ailments and its treatment protocols.

*“nityam hitaahaaravihaarasevee
Sameekshyakaaree vishayeshvasaktah”*

Values such as, “The diet and activities should be proper. Think before you act. Never indulge in vanities. Then, ailments will be kept at bay,” were left by our forefathers as guidelines to have a peaceful life, are they not? Untimely diet, sleep, travel, idleness are all grave mistakes. It’s a pity that people often turn a blind eye to these. Anyway, I am going to state in this article is the ramifications of untimely sleep.

We have the audacity to think that we can continue with our chores indefinitely. But no matter the type of the source of light, you are unable to withdraw your mind from sleep as former is under the jurisdiction of the latter. We are initiated into action only after acquiring the physical and mental capabilities. Prior to that, we slept for long hours during infancy. So there was no chance for these deliberate attempts. We cannot leave the habits of childhood as such. We slept during the day and cried during the night. It is only by the consumption of the solid food did we insidiously fall into the natural rhythm of sleep at night. The afore-mentioned rhythm has been in our system since infinite past, and hence it is impossible to come out of it.

It is an irrefutable fact that the advantages of sleep are numerous. Imagine our body to a clock and our mind to the various parts that make it tick. Sleep is the key that winds the wheels, and makes sure that the clock shows the right time. Improper sleep patterns result in grave ailments simultaneously resulting in breaking of the clock because of the over winding.

When faced with ambiguity, our predecessors painted a legend around it. They took the same road and attributed sleep as the illusion of Bhagavan Vishnu that preys across living beings as per his bidding. The ancient *aacaryas* like Sushruta point out that influence of *kapha* in the neural pathways causes sleep. The religious texts interpret it as the expressions of the *guna*. If one sleeps all the time, the *guna* of *tamas* is in play, whereas if one sleeps when he feels like, without any rules or discipline, it is the *guna*, *rajas*. Those who sleep at midnight are classified under the *satvaguna*. According to some, our heart is comparable to a lotus placed upside down and we are awake when it blooms and asleep when it folds. Numerous are the interpretations, but the most significant for we physicians, is that of Sri Sushruta who explains thus,

*Svabhaava eva vaa hetur -
ggariyaan parikeertyate*

which translates to, “Nature happens to be the cornerstone on which our sleep patterns are built upon” and it is this verse on which I have based my earlier observations.

Sleeping during the daytime is to be avoided for better health. Yet, during the summer, we can take a nap. Daytime sleep causes vitiation of the three *doshas*, especially *kapha* and *pitta*. Cough, burps, cold, heaviness in the head, aches in the body, lack of appetite, fever and soon set in, when you indulge in sleep during the daytime. Kids, old people, alcoholics, fatigued people, those who are tired due to sex, wandering or travelling; and those whose fat, blood, *kapha*, digestion and appetite are minimal, are all allowed to have a nap for not more than an hour. If sleep was deprived the previous day, the person should sleep prior to lunch to negate the ill effects of it. Staying awake at night is a harmful habit that causes dryness of the skin and perspiration thereby vitiating *vaata* and *pitta* resulting in aches, spinning of the head, swooning, *raktapitta*, *agnimaandya* and so on. It may also cause even mental diseases. Those who suffering from eye diseases should take care in sleeping during the night and avoid it during daytime. Staying awake during the night time, is more harmful than taking a daytime nap. The ones suffering from *kapha-roga*, obesity, affections of toxins are to stay awake during the night whereas those suffering from hiccups, stomach ache, loose bowels and so on are to sleep during the day.

Insomnia due to physical and mental disturbances is pretty common. The vitiation of *vaata* and *pitta* serve as the reason for it. The higher the vitiation, the higher the insomnia. Most of the people who complain

about their insomnia, often suffer from psychological disorders such as sudden grief, paranoia, rage etc. This burns the brain due to constant untameable wandering of the disturbed mind causing the said ailments. Vagbhata opines that *brahmacharya* blesses one with regular sleep. It is the observation of sexually excited persons that one loses sleep during the exalted state of Manmatha (Cupid), substantiates the former. Therefore, obsession with a thought triggers the wild wandering of our mind resulting in sleeplessness. Those who fail to achieve their desires will vouch for the aforementioned statement. People who are celibate and in bliss are blessed with sound sleep.

Insomnia due to mental disturbances ceases to exist only when the reason for the disturbances is resolved. Oil massages, *dhaara*, the consumption and administration of medicines that are *snigdha* and *seeta-veerya* in properties, the consumption of the delicacy prepared from wheat and sugarcane juice, milk, *maamsarasa* etc., heals insomnia. The other curative factors include the consumption of grapes and sugar in the night, the use of a soft and comfortable bed.

Hypersomnia is equally or even worse and harder to cure. As a treatment, *rookshana* and *langhana* are to be applied. The common protocols to achieve it are fasting, *vamanam*, *virecanam*, induction of some mental disturbances, bloodletting and so on.

People who adhere to normal sleeping patterns don't easily fall sick. Those who are *vaataprakrti* are light sleepers whereas the ones who belong to the *prakrti* of *kapha* are desirous of taking a nap during the day. The above mentioned patterns are permanent and not tend to change unless they suffer from diabetes or *vaata-roga*. The former are not to sleep during the day and the latter must not be awake at night. Following the normal sleep cycle is recommended because it provides us with physical strength, a sharp mind, glowing skin, *dhaatupushhti*, trimmed figure, long life and so on. Dozing off on a chair is considered healthy by some, because it doesn't cause *rooksha* and chill or rather the levels of these will be minimal.

It's quite astonishing that in spite of knowing the damages and grave health issues caused by insomnia we spend time engrossed in a performance of *kathakali* or *koothu* forgetting the fact that it is the sleeping time that we are missing. We pray, "Oh Lord! Bless me with long life and health." and watch *krishnanaattam* in its entirety, without sleeping, a wink, have a sumptuous breakfast, return home and sleep the entire day! How ironic? There are one hundred types of death and 99 of them are premature. Therefore, the digressions mentioned above are all means to the latter. I am sure no one would want to die early and hence let me conclude this piece with a piece of advice, think before deviating from the normal sleep cycle.