

Ayurveda & Sleep

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Nidrayattam Sukham Dukham, Pushti Karshya Balabalam /

Vrushata Kleebata Gyanam, Agyanam Jeevitam na cha // Ashatanga

Sleep is the greatest rejuvenator. According to ancient Ayurvedic texts your happiness, strength, endurance, potency, cognitive function and life span depends upon the quality of sleep. If not, it may lead to the opposite qualities such as unhappiness, debility, weakness, poor cognition and shorter life span.

Modern medicine is clearly validating this ancient truth. In fact Sleep is the most powerful anti-inflammatory activity that you will ever do. During sleep you boost immune function, renew cells, balance hormones, clean out the waste products and consolidate daily learning into memory.

The whole universe is under the influence of three *Maha Gunas* (great qualities), namely *Sattva, Rajas & Tamas*. *Sattva* stands for purity and creativity, *Rajas* stands for activity and dynamism and *Tamas* stands for ignorance and inertia. Sleep is often co-related with *Tamas* guna. The quality of night, darkness and sleep is often related with a covering or illusion. The Vedic scriptures refer to sleep as the feminine energy called “*Yogamaya*”. The whole world is under the influence of sleep for about 1/3rd of our life.

Creation, Maintenance and Destruction are the three cosmic forces that work hand in hand to enact the illusion of life. It is as if we die every night and wake up to the reality of life next day. Sleep is a naturally recurring state of suspended sensory as well as motor activity. All the voluntary muscles are inactive and do not respond strongly to any stimuli. The only thing that is active and awake is your subconscious mind. “*Swapna*” or dreams are often by-products of your mental activity.

Yada tu manasi klante karmatmanah klamanvita /

Visheyebhyo vinivartante tadaa swapati manavaha // Charaka

According to Ayurveda, Sleep is often defined as a state wherein the sense organs get detached from their objects as a result of tiredness from daylong activities. In this state the senses or the mind is unable to perceive any information. This is when we feel sleepy and experience a sensory withdrawal.

Sleep, Nutrition and Celibacy are considered to be the three pillars of health. Sleep is often correlated with stable moods and energy. People who are content and serene sleep well and wake up refreshed. Job satisfaction, increased productivity and emotional happiness also depend upon a good night sleep.

Vata people are anxious by nature and tend to worry a lot. They have hard time falling asleep. They are flighty and ungrounded. They should avoid any stimulating entertainment close to bedtime. Light oil massage and warm shower will dispel the fatigue and help them sleep better. A cup of warm milk with nutmeg, saffron and ghee will be a tonic. Herbal teas like chamomile or tulsi are also very useful.

Pitta people are planners and tend to analyze lot of things while they are sleeping. They often wake up around 2-3 am and have a hard time falling asleep. They should always rinse their feet with cool water before they sleep. They should also avoid working too close to bedtime. Gentle meditation of “Gratitude and Appreciation” will help them unwind and relax.

Kapha people are often happy people but when they accumulate Ama and their channels are blocked they tend to feel depressed and lose the quality of sleep. They should engage in daily brisk exercise and eat light at bedtime.

Meditation is one of the best techniques for effective stress management and improving the quality of sleep. It is equally effective in all the three mind-body types.

Sleep is referred to as “*Bhuta Dhatri*,” meaning “provides nourishment and rejuvenation to all the creatures.” Ayurveda describes *Ratri Charya* or nightly routine to improve the quality of sleep. It includes eating an easily digestible dinner, short walks in the moonlight, aromas, bedroom ambience and a gentle prayer.

As we often say “ a good day begins the night before”.