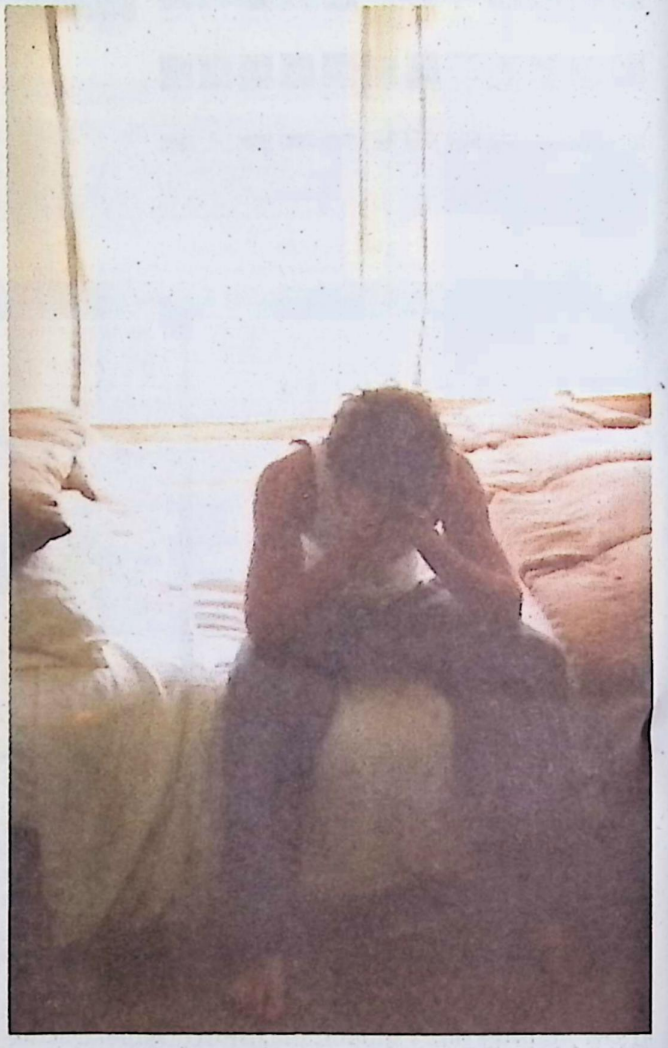
Are You Getting Enough Sleep?

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A Quick Quiz

Does it often take you hours to get to sleep at night, however hard you try? Do you find that you wake up in the middle of the night, and cannot go back to sleep again? Do you wake up very early in the morning, even when you don't want to? Has anyone commented that you are irritable and annoyed after you wake up every morning? Do you start feeling drowsy during mid-day, when your colleagues are buzzing? Do you wake up from sleep when someone makes the slightest noise in the bedroom?

If you have answered 'yes' to three or more of the above questions, it is highly likely that you are sleep-deprived. Insomnia is a medical condition that means an impaired natural sleep-cycle.

The Importance of Sleep

Why is sleep so important for us? This is because sleep is the state of consciousness which enables our tired bodies to rest and build energy for the next day, i.e., it is the time the body recharges itself. But that's not all during sleep, our immune system carries out a large number of its functions at the greatest rate, such as fighting off infections and other diseases. When you sleep, your brain starts 'filing and organising' the events that have occurred during the day. In fact, it is during sleep that many of your memories are stored into your 'hard drive'. Hence, if you are not sleeping well, it makes you feel tired, lethargic, drowsy, irritable and easily confused, while making you more susceptible to illness and have poor memory, thus affecting your mental and physical well-being.

Normal Sleeping Hours

So, how many hours of sleep is considered 'normal'? Every individual is different, so it is difficult to say what is 'normal' for you. But as reference, it is normal for newborn babies to sleep more than 16 hours a day, and for young children of school-going age to sleep upto 10 hours a day. Teenagers and adults normally require 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Those above 70 require less sleep, with 6 hours being the normal sleeping time.

Diagnosing a sleeping problem

If you have answered yes to some of the questions I asked in the beginning and suffer from poor sleep, then this article should be helpful to enable you to sleep better.

Insomnia is classified according to the number of days that a person has poor sleep for. Some insomnias only last for 2-3 days (transient insomnia), some more than 3 days but less than 3 weeks (short-term insomnia) and some most nights for 3 weeks or longer (chronic insomnia). Chronic insomnia is worrying as it leads to a number of mental health problems such as depression, and may lead to alcohol or sedative addiction in order to gain sleep.

Causes of Poor Sleep

- Physical problems such as arthritis, headaches, back pain, hot flushes (in menopause), gastric problems (acidity and reflux), itchiness and Parkinson's Disease usually cause sleeping disturbances. If these are causing you trouble to sleep at night, it is best to take advice from your doctor as the cause of these physical symptoms must be alleviated before your sleep can return to normal.
- Physiological problems such as noise, too much light, sharing a bed with a partner who moves about a lot or snores very loudly, or doing stimulating activities such as reading or exercising immediately before going to sleep causes poor-slumber.
- Psychological symptoms that may cause sleep problems include relationship problems with your partner, stress (work/academic), bereavement of a close one and anxiety. I have met patients who developed insomnia simply because they were worrying too much during bed-time about how little sleep they were getting, rather than using this time to catch up on lost sleep!
- Finally, a common cause of sleep disturbance is side-effects of common medications. Antidepressants