

BRITISH SNORING & SLEEP APNOEA ASSOCIATION



FACTS ABOUT SLEEP AND SLEEP DISORDERS

There are more than 80 different sleep problems listed in medical textbooks ranging from the inability to get to sleep (insomnia) to the inability to stay awake (narcolepsy).

Many sleep problems are temporary and resolve quickly, while long-term sleep problems can be a symptom of other medical or psychological conditions.

Most of us will suffer a sleep disorder at some time but often sleep problems remain undiagnosed.

Lack of sleep can make us physically unwell and stressed.

Scientists believe that sleep deprivation contributes to heart disease, premature ageing and traffic accidents.

Sleep deprivation elevates the heart rate and blood pressure and causes us to be sleepy which has its own problems - dangerous driving.

Insomnia, snoring and sleep bruxism (teeth grinding and clenching) are the commonest sleep disorders.

A whopping 95% of us have experienced insomnia. There are 15 million snorers in the UK. 10% of the population suffer sleep bruism.

Insomnia has a multitude of causes: Existing medical condition especially pain. Use of certain medications such as antidepressants or even recreational drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy. Other medical disorders such as Parkinson's disease. Psychosocial factors such as stress, anxiety, external noises such as snoring, traffic or a combination of these.

Sleep bruxism is generally a reaction to some form of stress or anxiety and is more likely to be a psychological problem rather than medical. However, teeth grinding may occur as a reaction to pain and the medications that are taken to alleviate it.

Bruxism occurs during the arousal phase of the sleep cycle and it is strongly associated with other sleep disorders such as sleep apnoea, sleep talking, violent or injurious behaviour, but the strongest link is to sleep apnoea and snoring.

Narcolepsy (an irresistible desire to fall asleep), can take many years to diagnose but is thought to affect around 2,000 people. Symptoms can include cataplexy (sudden muscle weakness brought on by strong emotion), a feeling of paralysis on waking and hallucinations. The condition is caused by low levels of the neurotransmitter orexin, which controls wakefulness and sleep.

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) affects up to 10% of the population, with symptoms of burning, twitching and tingling. It is due to the abnormality in the parts of the brain that control the feeling of movement and thought to be caused by a lack of the brain chemical dopamine. It can also be a sign of iron deficiency.

Parasomnias which cause unusual behaviour during sleep such as sleep walking, sleep terrors and even sleep eating are due to incomplete awakening from the deepest stages of sleep (Non-Rapid Eye Movement) so that you are partly asleep and partly awake. These conditions can be caused by stress, sedative drugs or alcohol.

Sleep myoclonus (jumping in your sleep), is involuntary contraction and relaxation of muscles. The movements occur early in the sleep cycle and may be triggered by external stimuli such as loud noises.