

PODCAST: SOMNOLOGY PT.2 WITH DR.W. CHRIS WINTER

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The second segment of the Somnology podcast dives into answering questions from their audience on how to deal with insomnia. All the questions received were grouped into categories and discussed at length with Dr. Winter. One such question enquired as to why some people have different circadian rhythms than others. Dr. Winter said that genetics play a large role in this, with individuals usually inheriting their sleeping patterns from either parent. Another listener asked why some people experience sudden shifts from being a night owl to a morning person, with Allie humorously commenting that she assumed her shift towards being a morning person meant she was getting her life in order. However, as Dr. Winter pointed out, this phenomenon is usually due to environmental factors, and is common to see as one matures in age.

Ways to prevent some of the noises made as one fell asleep was also another question posed, which provided a gateway into discussing different sounds made as one drifts off into unconsciousness, such as catathrenia (a prolonged expiratory moan) and somniloquy (sleep talking). Both these conditions are usually indicative of an underlying issue, such as breathing disturbances due to acidic reflux and have no direct treatments. Treatment for the underlying issues causing these conditions was the best way to treat them. Dr. Winter provided an example of somniloquy in which his wife woke up in the middle of the night and spoke about removing dead bodies from their lawn, an X-Files reference as they had been watching the show prior. At this time, he said it was easier to just go along with what someone sleep talking was saying rather than try to reason with them.

Another listener asked if bisecting one's sleep should be reintroduced, and reference is made to A. Roger Ekirch's *At Day's Close: Night in Time's Past*, which provides a look at sleeping patterns throughout history. Surprisingly enough, indulging in periods of wakefulness between sleeping periods was common and actually poses no threat to your sleep cycle. A C-3PO alarm causes much more damage because it literally jarrs you out of unconsciousness into wakefulness.

Allie and Dr. Winter also discussed the detriments of shift work and how it negatively impacts one's health. Research shows that not only is shift work classed as a carcinogen, that is, a cancer-causing agent by the World Health Organization, but numerous cancers have an increased risk of development in both men and women. Aside from that, shift workers also had weight difficulties, blood pressure issues and heart attacks. Dr. Winter heavily recommended shift workers speak to sleep specialists to help curb these issues, and that those with careers that expose them to jet lag also do the same. They then spoke about the required amount of sleep and why it's different for everyone, with Dr. Winter pointing out that everyone would need a different amount of sleep based on their individual circumstances.

Sleeping positions were also discussed in relation to how they affect the quality of sleep obtained. Sleeping on one's left side seemed more favorable than sleeping on one's right as the body's blood returns passively via the right side. Hence sleeping on your left side lessens the compression of your right side, but comes at the risk of complaining about pains in your shoulder, hips and knees. Sleeping on your back causes your airway to collapse but is the best position to sleep in according to orthopedics. However women with large breasts and children with large tonsils may find this position uncomfortable.

The manifestation of sleep deprivation was also explored, with Dr. Winter recounting his residency days when he would eat entire family sized packs of Chips Ahoy cookies. Lack of sleep disrupts our bodies regular functions, and causes the hormones leptin, ghrelin and insulin to fluctuate. The disruption of these hormones, responsible for appetite and fat storage respectively, cause individuals to gain weight. Having a baby can also cause sleep disruptions in new parents, and Dr. Winter advises baby scheduling as the best way forward if you want to be able to simultaneously get things done and enjoy parenthood. Another person asked if you can catch up on missed sleep, which is indeed possible once you make up for the sleep loss within a relatively quick period of time.

Another question spoke on melatonin and sleeping pills, and asked about their safety and effectiveness. Melatonin is produced naturally from our pineal gland, but is also produced by some plants. Dr. Winter likened it to an appetite stimulant and cautioned the audience on its use. While useful for inducing sleep, melatonin dependency is quite easy to fall into, hence the good doctor advises against use if you really don't have a reason to. One of the key inhibitors of melatonin production in the brain is blue light, which many technological devices emit. Hence why many professionals advise people not to use their phones before they go to bed. Dr. Winter's advice with regards to this is to manage your screen time wisely.

Winter also explained the terms hypersomnia and narcolepsy, stating that narcolepsy falls under the category of hypersomnia. Narcolepsy is where the brain produces insufficient chemicals to induce wakefulness. This can occur regardless of the individual gaining sufficient sleep, and is usually outside of their control.

Quote:

*“It’s amazing how
quickly sleep comes
when you try not to do
it.”*



References

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/somnology-sleep-part-2-with-dr-w-chris-winter/id1278815517?i=1000422378279>

Neuroscience
F o u n d a t i o n