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Understanding Sleep Disorders

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Causes and Symptoms

Sleep disorders can become a part of a person's life at any age and, depending on each case, they can either be short-term or become chronic.

Every sleep disorder has a specific way of altering your healthy sleep pattern. Some people experience problems falling asleep; others have a hard time waking up, or wake up multiple times during the night. Grinding your teeth or having night terrors are also common issues.

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Main Causes of Sleep Disturbance

As you can see, there are a lot of different types of sleep disorders. Each one with its set of symptoms. Later on, we'll concentrate on the ones that appear more frequently, but right now, we'll focus on what they all have in common: disruption of sleep and feeling unrested during the day.

The cause of any sleep disorder is not always easily identifiable, and many times there is more than one factor that intervenes.

However, sleep disorders can be explained as being caused by at least one out of five main categories:

Psychological Causes

These refer to sleep disturbances that occur under distressing circumstances; for example, going through a grieving process, or experiencing a particularly frustrating time with family, a partner, or at work. Sleep disorders that are caused by psychological distress also tend to be temporary and diminish as the individual learns to cope better with his/her experiences. However, as you now know, sleep disorders can be both a symptom and a cause of a psychological disorder.

Medical Causes

Medical illnesses can affect sleep patterns, especially chronic conditions like breathing disorders, heartburn, diabetes, and –most of all– neurological disorders. It's always a good idea to consult with a physician to find out if another health problem is causing the sleep disturbances. Also, a great variety of medications can have an impact on the amount and type of sleep a person gets.

Substance-Related Causes

Substance abuse, whether it is alcohol, drugs, or caffeine, influences our sleeping patterns since our central nervous system is directly affected. Later on, we'll discuss how caffeine and alcohol disrupt sleeping patterns.

Environmental Causes

Due to the fast-paced society we live in and the busy lives we have, many of us don't take proper care of the environment in which we sleep. Noise, light, irregular sleeping schedules, too much food (or lack of nutritious food) can affect how we sleep. Environmental causes are so important, and yet, we don't even realize that neglecting our body's needs can have serious repercussions. Later on, we will discuss this in more detail.

Psychiatric Causes

Psychiatric disorders, such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, can also affect and be affected by sleep. In case there is even a shred of doubt, it is always best to consult a professional.

Symptoms of a Sleep Disorder

Now that you know the five possible causes of sleep disorders, which also tend to overlap, it's time to take a look at the warning signs. Every type of sleep disorder manifests differently, but generally speaking, the main symptoms of sleep disorders are:

- Inability to fall asleep or stay asleep during the night.

- Feeling tired all the time.
- Irritability or other mood disturbances during the day.
- Having a difficult time waking up.
- Muscle pain and headaches.
- Sleepwalking.
- Having night terrors, snoring, bruxism (grinding your teeth, while you sleep).
- Slow reactions, inability to concentrate and memory issues.
- Needing external stimulation, such as caffeine, to make it through the day.

There Is Always a Solution

This overview of sleep disorders will help you to understand better if you're going through some situational sleep problems or you've got a more settled sleep disorder. Either way, here you'll find techniques that can help you to get some sleep finally.

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