



Sleep disorders are a group of conditions that affect the ability to sleep well on a regular basis. About 25 per cent of the population in Fiji suffers from sleeping disorders. Picture: artofhealthyliving.com

Are you having problems with sleeping?

Sleep disorders

SLEEP disorders are a group of conditions that affect the ability to sleep well on a regular basis. About 25 per cent of the population in Fiji suffers from sleeping disorders.

Whether they are caused by a health problem or by too much stress, sleep disorders are becoming increasingly common and many are not aware that they have it.

Most people occasionally experience sleeping problems because of stress, hectic schedules, and other outside influences. However, when these issues begin to occur on a regular basis and interfere with daily life, they may indicate a sleeping disorder.

Depending on the type of sleep disorder, people may have a difficult time falling asleep and may feel extremely tired throughout the day.

The lack of sleep can have a negative impact on energy, mood, concentration, and overall health. They can also affect your performance at work, cause strain in relationships, and impair your ability to perform daily activities.

It's important to receive a diagnosis and treatment right away if you suspect you might have a sleep disorder. When left untreated, the negative effects of sleep disorders can lead to further health consequences.

What are the different types of sleep disorders?

There are many different types of sleep disorders. Some may be caused by other underlying health conditions.

Insomnia

Insomnia refers to the inability to fall asleep or to remain asleep. It can be caused by jet lag, stress and anxiety, hormones, or diges-

tive problems. It may also be a symptom of another condition.

Insomnia can be problematic for your overall health and quality of life, potentially causing:

- depression;
- difficulty concentrating;
- irritability;
- weight gain; and
- impaired work or school performance.

Unfortunately, insomnia is extremely common and is most prevalent among older adults and women.

Sleep apnea

Sleep apnea is characterised by pauses in breathing during sleep.

This is a serious medical condition that causes the body to take in less oxygen. It can also cause you to wake up during the night.

The two types of sleep apnea are obstructive sleep apnea and central sleep apnea.

Parasomnias

Parasomnias are a class of sleep disorders that cause abnormal movements and behaviours during sleep. They include:

- sleep walking;
- sleep talking;
- groaning;
- nightmares;
- bedwetting; and
- teeth grinding or jaw clenching.

Restless leg syndrome

Restless leg syndrome (RLS) is an overwhelming need to move the legs. This urge is sometimes accompanied by a tingling sensation in the legs.

While these symptoms can occur during the day, they are most prevalent at night.

RLS is often associated with certain health conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Parkinson's disease, but the ex-

act cause isn't always known.

Narcolepsy

Narcolepsy is characterised by "sleep attacks" that occur while awake. This means that you will suddenly feel extremely tired and fall asleep without warning.

The disorder can also cause sleep paralysis, which may make you physically unable to move right after waking up.

Although narcolepsy may occur on its own, it is also associated with certain neurological disorders, such as multiple sclerosis.

What are the symptoms of sleep disorders?

Symptoms differ depending on the severity and type of sleeping disorder.

However, general symptoms of sleep disorders include:

- difficulty falling or staying asleep;
- daytime fatigue;
- strong urge to take naps during the day;
- unusual breathing patterns;
- unusual or unpleasant urges to move while falling asleep;
- unusual movement or other experiences while asleep;
- unintentional changes to your sleep/wake schedule;
- irritability or anxiety;
- impaired performance at work or school;
- lack of concentration;
- depression; and
- weight gain.

What causes sleep disorders?

There are many conditions, diseases, and disorders that can cause sleep disturbances. In many cases, sleep disorders develop as a result of an underlying health problem. This may include: allergies, respiratory problems, frequent urination, chronic pain, Stress and anxiety.

How are sleep disorders diagnosed?

Your doctor will first perform a physical exam and gather information about your symptoms and medical history. They may also order various tests, including Polysomnography, Electroencephalogram and the multiple sleep latency test.

These tests can be crucial in determining the right course of treatment for sleep disorders.

How are sleep disorders treated?

Treatment for sleep disorders can vary depending on the type and underlying cause. However, it generally includes a combination of medical treatments and lifestyle changes.

Medical treatments

Medical treatment for sleep disturbances might include any of the following:

- sleeping pills;
- melatonin supplements;
- allergy or cold medication;
- medications for any underlying health issues;
- breathing device or surgery (usually for sleep apnea); and
- a dental guard (usually for teeth grinding).

Lifestyle changes

Lifestyle adjustments can greatly improve your quality of sleep, especially when they're done along with medical treatments. You may want to consider:

- incorporating more vegetables and fish into your diet, and reducing sugar intake;
- reducing stress and anxiety by exercising and stretching;
- creating and sticking to a regular sleeping schedule;
- drinking less water before bed-time;
- limiting your caffeine intake, especially in the late afternoon or evening;

- decreasing tobacco and alcohol use;
- eating smaller low carbohydrate meals before bedtime; and
- maintaining a healthy weight based on your doctor's recommendations.

Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day can also significantly improve your sleep quality. While you might be tempted to sleep in on the weekends, this can make it more difficult to wake up and fall asleep during the workweek.

What is the outlook for someone with a sleep disorder?

The effects of sleep disorders can be so disruptive that you will likely want immediate relief. Unfortunately, long-term cases can take a bit more time to resolve.

However, if you stick with your treatment plan and regularly communicate with your doctor, you can find your way to better sleep.

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