

## Studies Reveal How to Get Good Night's Sleep

One of the most common complaints that I hear from my patients is that they don't sleep well at night. I am sure that many of you who are reading this newsletter are having similar problems. There was a study recently presented at the American Heart Association Meeting in Orlando, Florida that is related to this topic<sup>1</sup>. More than one thousand healthy adult men and women studied for a six month period were given simvastatin (an anti-cholesterol drug sold under the trade name Zocor), Pravachol or placebo. It was found that those patients taking Zocor had significantly worse sleep quality than those in the placebo group or those that took Pravachol. It was thought that Zocor, which is fat soluble and penetrates through the blood brain barrier, was possibly causing the impaired sleep. There are literally millions of people in this country taking Zocor and similar type drugs.

Using this study as a springboard, I thought I would devote this week's newsletter to sleep and lack of sleep, otherwise known as insomnia. It is unclear how many people suffer with insomnia in this country, though it is estimated to be somewhere between 30 million and 70 million people. There are two main types of insomnia, those being primary and secondary. The most common type is secondary insomnia, which is related to certain heart and lung diseases, anxiety, medication and certain stimulants, such as caffeine, alcohol and tobacco. It is also associated with restless legs syndrome, a change in sleep routine and a poor sleep environment. Primary insomnia, which is much less common, does not appear to be related to any medication or other medical issues. Unfortunately, insomnia can lead to a host of health problems, including weight gain, insulin resistance with elevated blood sugar and elevated blood pressure. Insomnia can be mild to severe, with chronic insomnia defined as difficulty sleeping for at least three nights a week for more than one month. It seems that older adults are more likely to have insomnia than younger people. This has certainly been my experience in my patient population. Stress and other emotional factors can clearly play a large role in having difficulty turning off your brain at night. Aside from the longer term medical effects of insomnia, people who do not get adequate sleep on a regular basis can experience difficulty focusing on tasks and difficulty learning and performing on the job or at school. It also can limit your energy level and activities.

There are certain things that you can immediately do if you have insomnia. Obviously, it is important to avoid caffeine, tobacco and other stimulants around bedtime. It may seem that drinking alcohol before bedtime may be helpful. In point of fact, however, although alcohol can make it easier to fall asleep, your sleep tends to be lighter than normal and you're more likely to wake up during the night. It's important not to exercise, eat or drink (in general) excessively before bedtime. I recommend to my patients to read in bed with a low voltage light, and to choose reading material that is soothing and comforting to the soul. Certainly not the latest spy novel! As you feel your eyes becoming heavy, do not get out of bed, just turn the light out and drift off to sleep. Should you awaken later in the night, turning the light back on without disturbing your partner to continue reading can be helpful. I generally do not like my patients to get out of bed and start watching television or doing other similar type of activities. Trying to do some relaxation techniques prior to bedtime may also be beneficial. There are a host of prescription medications for insomnia. Unfortunately, for the

most part, they are addictive and cause tolerance over time.

There are several natural remedies that may help with sleep. Perhaps the best known one is melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone that is produced in the pineal gland of the brain, primarily at night. Over time, melatonin levels decrease and can effect sleep. There was a study published in the October 2007 issue of the journal *Current Medical Research and Opinion*<sup>2</sup>. In this study, 354 men and women ages 55 to 80 participated. Each night, half were given 2 mg of time-released melatonin taken two hours before bed and the other half were given placebo. The study went on for several weeks. It was found the time-released melatonin resulted in significant and clinically meaningful improvements in sleep quality, morning alertness, sleep onset latency and quality of life in a group of patients suffering with primary insomnia. There was another double-blinded, randomized control study published in the April 2007 issue of the *Journal of Neurology*<sup>3</sup>. Eighteen patients suffering with a progressive neurologic disturbance were randomized to receive 3 mg of melatonin or placebo one hour before bedtime for a period of four weeks. It was found that those patients given melatonin had significant improvement in subjective quality of sleep.

Another interesting nutrient that may help with sleep and also anxiety is an herbal called passion flower (*passiflora incarnate*). This herbal supplement has been used for many years for anxiety, insomnia, restlessness and a host of other conditions. There was recently an animal study published in the journal *AANA*<sup>4</sup>. An important passion flower extract is a compound called chrysin. In this study, 44 rats were treated in a double-blinded, placebo-controlled trial. It was found that chrysin significantly decreased anxiety compared to the controls. There have also been two human studies in the medical literature involving 198 participants<sup>5</sup>. One study indicated that as a result of taking passion flower, there was an improvement in job performance and a lower rate of drowsiness compared to taking a traditional tranquilizer. There are other supplements that may have beneficial effects on promoting sleep as well, including valerian root, hops, 5HTP and magnesium.

Vitacost.com offers several quality products for your sleep concerns. There's a product from Nutraceutical Sciences Institute® (NSI®) containing 700 mg of [passion flower](#) for a two-capsule serving; a serving size of 150 costs less than \$10. NSI® also offers a 3 mg time-release melatonin. We also sell [valerian root](#) and a product called [Healthy Sleep](#). Many of the reviews for these products are quite impressive. For those of you who suffer with sleep disturbances, I recommend that you try these various products. They are generally quite safe and there is no problem with addiction. Although not every product may work for you, there may be one that will just do the trick.

1. Golomb B, Kwon EK, Criqui MH, Dimsdale JE, **Cholesterol-lowering drug linked to sleep disruptions**, American Heart Association Meeting Scientific Sessions 2007, November 4 – 7, Orlando, Florida. Cholesterol-lowering drug linked to sleep disruptions.

2. Wade AG, Ford I, Crawford G, McMahon AD, Nir T, Laudon M, Zisapel N, **Efficacy of prolonged release melatonin in insomnia patients aged 55-80 years: quality of sleep and next-day alertness outcomes**, *Current Medical Research and Opinion*, September 14, 2007 (Online).

3. Mendes Medeiros CA, Carvalhedo de Bruin PF, Lopes LA, Magalhães MC, de Lourdes Seabra M and de Bruin VMS, **Effect of exogenous melatonin on sleep and motor dysfunction in Parkinson's disease**, *Journal of Neurology*, April 03, 2007 (Online).

4. Brown E, Hurd NS, McCall S and Ceremuga TE, Evaluation of the anxiolytic effects of chrysin, a *Passiflora incarnata* extract, in the laboratory rat, *AANA Journal*, October 2007, pp. 333 – 337.

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