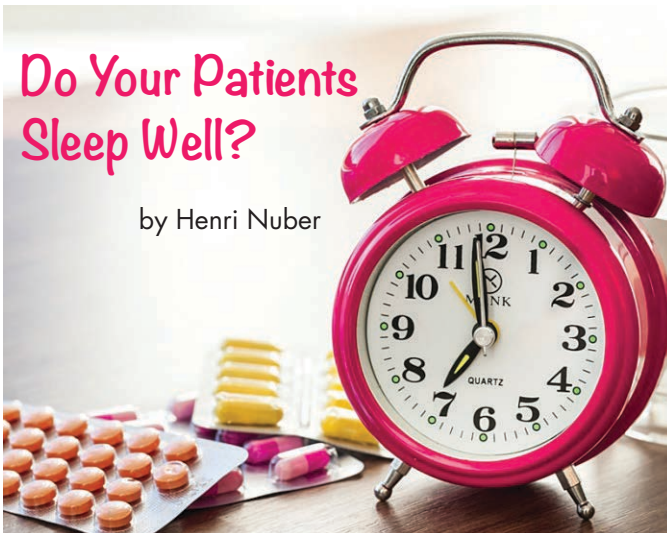


Do Your Patients Sleep Well?

by Henri Nuber



As we all know, good sleep is critical to good health; without it, your body cannot heal and rejuvenate itself and provide you with sufficient energy to function properly. Good sleep is as vital as the air that we breathe, the food we eat, and the physical activities we undertake to maintain good health. And this is especially so for individuals with chronic diseases or compromised immune systems.

However, sleep problems are widespread: whether it be specific disorders such as insomnia or sleep apnea, or issues such as physical aches and pain, work-related anxiety and/or personal stress. Recent studies indicate that over 50 million Americans, of all ages and socio-economic classes, suffer from more than 80 different sleep disorders, and another 20 to 30 million of them experience recurrent sleep problems each year. Plus, most adults surveyed indicate that they do not sleep well at least one night every month, and of those, almost 12% report insufficient sleep every night.

Sleep deprivation (less than 7 hours a night for adults) has risen considerably over the past 30 years or so as the lines between work and home have blurred, and digital technology has become a key part of our lives. And according to The National Institutes of Health our nation's sleep debt is on the rise, and by the middle of this century more than 100 million Americans will have difficulty falling asleep. It is an alarming statistic if you consider that sleep represents one third of a person's life, and has a huge impact on the way that we live, function and perform during the other two-thirds.

On an everyday level, sleep deprivation and/or poor quality sleep detrimentally affects attentiveness, reaction times, learning ability, the accuracy of short-term memory, hand-eye coordination, and mood. Long-term it can lead to recurrent mental and emotional distress, weight gain, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and other serious health issues.

While there are a myriad of solutions to a wide range

of sleep disorders, many of your patients have probably first considered, on the ready advice of their allopathic doctor, taking prescribed pain or sleeping medications, many of which are addictive and/or potentially dangerous. However, there are a number of safe and natural remedies that chiropractic care can offer them. If it is chronic pain that prevents your patients from sleeping well, be it headache, neck or back pain, a chiropractic adjustment may be the answer, since it helps to relieve discomfort, and it also enhances relaxation and blood flow. For patients who suffer neuropathic pain, light therapy treatment can provide safe and drug-free relief, while natural sleep supplements have also proven to be a benign and effective solution for many people.

And although chiropractors are not normally considered experts on sleep issues, they can do more than diagnose and treat pain and discomfort; they can broach the subject of proper sleep as part of their basic patient protocol, particularly since poor quality sleep and poor quality health often go hand in hand.

Initiating discussions about their sleep quality and sleep habits, and regularly following up on these issues, is key to having your patients understand that proper sleep is a vital element of health and wellbeing. (This may all seem obvious but you'd be surprised at how many people just think that everyone nowadays has trouble sleeping and that it's no big deal that they do as well, so why even bother asking their healthcare practitioner about it.)

Aside from the more serious disorders such as sleep apnea (which are often best referred to specific specialists), chiropractors can make recommendations on a number of factors which may be causing poor sleep quality and sleep deprivation: from advising patients on good sleep habits such as moderate exercise to promote quality sleep; a regular and relaxing bedtime routine; a pleasant sleep environment, et al, to suggesting sleep positions – of note, most discourage patients from sleeping on their stomach. DCs may also recommend a particular type of therapeutic pillow or pressure-relieving foam mattress to better suit a patient's sleep style and preferred comfort level. And chiropractors whose clinical expertise includes nutrition and supplements may suggest natural sleep aids such as melatonin, valerian root, magnesium, lavender and glycine, in combination with good sleep habits and the right pillow and/or mattress.

The key takeaway is that, as a healthcare practitioner, and regardless of the particular health issue(s) you may be addressing, it is critical that you include the subject of proper, restorative sleep in your discussion with patients about their overall health and the ongoing care that they require. Additionally, it's an important step in educating them to be more pro-active about their health, wellbeing, and longevity.

About The Author: Henri Nuber is the publisher of Chiropractic Products.