Sleep, Insomnia, and Hepatitis C

This article originally appeared in the HCV Advocate, offers tips and information regarding sleep and insomnia for those with hepatitis C and liver disease

April 6, 2015 By Alan Franciscus

A good night's sleep is a critical component of living healthy especially with hepatitis C. As any insomiac will tell you, getting a restful night's sleep may be one of the most difficult goals to achieve, but man when you get one it's like achieving nirvana!

Recently, the National Sleep Foundation released new recommendations for Americans of every age. While these are recommendations, there are always reasons why people may require more sleep than recommended. For instance, if you have an illness or are being treated for hepatitis C your body needs more sleep than recommended to heal and recover.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends the following hours of sleep every day:

- Newborns (0-3 months): 14-17 hours
- Infants (4-11 months): 12-15 hours
- Toddlers (1-2 years): 11-14 hours
- Preschoolers (3-5 years): 10-13 hours
- School-age children (6-13): 9-11 hours
- Teenagers (14-17): 8-10 hours
- Young Adults & Adults (18-64): 7-9 hours
- Older Adults (65+): 7-8 hours

Causes of Insomnia

There are many causes of insomnia or sleeplessness including:

- Living with hepatitis C and the uncertainty of life with a potentially deadly illness
- People who are on HCV treatment may worry about being cured
- Sleep apnea (a medical condition that interferes with people's breathing while they sleep)

- Certain prescribed and over-the-counter medications
- A sleeping partner who snores or is restless (including pets)
- Too much alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, too little or too much food before bedtime
- Change in work schedule
- Traveling long distances, travel across time zones, and many, many more reasons

Complications of Insomnia

- Anxiety and depression
- Slow reaction times and poor work performance
- Irritability
- Increased risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes
- Substance use
- Overeating and obesity that could lead to fatty liver

Self-Help Tips

- Limit caffeine, soda, tea, chocolate
- Avoid or cut back on alcohol and tobacco especially too close to bedtime
- Go to bed the same time every night
- Have a consistent routine when preparing for bed—brush teeth, read a book—this tells your mind and body you are ready for bed
- Make sure your bed/pillow is comfortable
- Don’t go to bed hungry, but don’t eat a large meal too close to bedtime
- Use earplugs and eye masks to block noise and light if needed.
- Turn off your mind when going to sleep—try relaxation techniques and tapes. If you cannot sleep, get up do something boring and go back to bed.

Medical care

There are many over-the-counter and prescription medications that can treat chronic insomnia. People who suffer from chronic insomnia can benefit from a sleep study to determine if they have sleep apnea or another sleep disorder. A symptom of sleep apnea is being tired during the day—the same symptom that is the most common symptom of hepatitis C. Treating sleep apnea

can improve everyone’s quality of life especially those with hepatitis C.

Don’t live your life full of sleepless nights—practice self-help strategies and get medical help as needed to live life to the fullest. No one should live a life full of sleepless nights and days full of being tired. Get tested. Get treated. Get Cured.

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