



Sleep Services for Adults provided by the Scottsdale Sleep Center:

"Do You Have a Sleep Disorder?"

Everyone sleeps and everyone can have trouble sleeping. Does everyone have a sleep disorder? What is a sleep disorder? How do you know if you have one?

Normal sleep comes naturally. It is not learned or taught. Abnormal sleep also comes naturally, but it can be learned, result from behavior or habits, or come as the result of a physical or mental disorder or illness. When enough abnormal sleep occurs to result in medical, behavior or mental problems, a sleep disorder is present. Therefore, a sleep disorder can be defined as an abnormality of sleep which results in medical, behavioral or mental problems.

How are sleep disorders identified? Who will note or discover a sleep disorder? Often, it will not be the person who is suffering with the disorder. In the case of a medical abnormality, the person's physicians may note an elevated blood pressure and ask questions which lead to suspicion and then diagnosis of obstructive sleep apnea. The bed partner or parents may note unusual activity or breathing during the person's sleep. Individuals with sleep disorders may recognize and report to their physician symptoms such as daytime sleepiness, depression and fatigue. Sleep disorders and their effects can be recognized by physicians, family and friends, as well as the person with the problem. Interestingly, the person with the sleep disorder is often the last to recognize the problem.

A sleep disorder can disturb sleep, causing too much sleep or not enough sleep. It can cause sleep at the wrong time or an inability to stay awake. It can keep sleep from coming when it is needed. It can be associated with unusual movements or trouble breathing during sleep. The varied effects of sleep disorders are quite remarkable.

What causes sleep disorders? Books have been written on specific sleep disorders, their causes and treatments, but there are some general statements regarding factors which produce certain sleep disorders. A sleep disorder can be traced to social and behavioral habits. The most obvious of these is the effect of caffeine. Coffee, tea or soda drinkers who learn to drink at a young age, often can ingest enough caffeine to interfere with sleep as they get older. External environmental and social events can affect the quality and quantity of our sleep.

Sleep disorders can be caused by defects in the function or the metabolism of certain brain or nerve cells. Narcolepsy, a condition of excessive sleepiness and sleep attacks, is a good example of such a condition.

Often, a sleep disorder is the frequent occurrence of an event which happens only occasionally in normal individuals. Sleep Apnea Syndrome is a good example. Apnea is the cessation of breathing for 10 seconds or longer. Many normal individuals will have apnea, but only occasionally or at most, a few times a night. However, a person with the problems of Sleep Apnea Syndrome will stop breathing ten to a hundred times an hour. The sleep is disturbed by the apnea and many serious medical problems may result. Why apnea occurs so frequently is usually not known. In some individuals, the frequent apnea may be explained by excessive body weight or the anatomy of the throat.

In short, sleep disorders can affect a person's days or nights. They may be apparent to the person with the problem or more apparent to someone else. They can cause someone to sleep too much, too little or cause unusual activities while sleeping. Sound familiar? Ask your physician or seek help from a sleep specialist or sleep center.

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