Approaches to Holistic Wellness

Sleep and Mental Health by David Snebold

Getting a good night’s sleep helps us all function day to day. It is paramount in promoting good mental health. There is a direct correlation between sleep and mental health illness. It is worth noting that many people who experience issues with schizophrenia, anxiety, ADHD and other brain disorders have a great deal of trouble falling asleep. Only fewer than 20% of people diagnosed with a mental health disorder do not have sleep issues. Good sleep hygiene is vital in dealing with mental health and mood disorders. It is worth noting that people with mental health conditions that experience trouble sleeping spend less time in the REM (otherwise known as the deep, restorative part of the sleep cycle). Not getting enough REM sleep directly correlates to having more struggles during the day dealing with symptoms. The worse time you have trying to sleep, arguably the worse you are going to feel during the day. (Tuck)

A lot of Americans are deprived of sleep, but those with psychiatric conditions are more likely to be groggy or yawning during the daytime. “Chronic sleep problems affect 50% to 80% of patients in a typical psychiatric practice, compared with 10% to 18% of adults in the general U.S. population. Sleep problems are particularly common in patients with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)... But studies in both adults and children suggest that sleep problems may raise risk for, and even directly contribute to, the development of some psychiatric disorders.” (Harvard)

Anxiety disorders and sleep. No matter what the cause of stress is for the individual, when you have an anxiety disorder your nervous system does not reset back to a normal state after stress, as it would for those without an anxiety disorder. “This heightened state of anxiety keeps their nervous system constantly alert, in direct opposition to the sort of relaxation necessary for falling asleep...Cortisol, the body’s stress hormone, operates in inverse to melatonin, the hormone responsible for inducing sleep. With more stress in our system, the tougher it is for our brain to produce adequate amounts of melatonin.” (Tuck)

Depression and sleep. “Insomnia affects 75% of individuals with depression, and it’s a major risk factor for suicide among this population...Depressed individuals are more likely to spend a longer time falling asleep, spend less time asleep overall, experience disturbed sleep, and spend less time in REM sleep...” (Tuck) These high numbers go to show that there is a link between insomnia and depression.

Schizophrenia and sleep. Schizophrenia affects around 1 percent of American citizens. “This severe mental illness interferes with their ability to process reality,
manage their emotions, and communicate with others. It’s accompanied by debilitating symptoms, such as hallucinations and psychosis. Between 30 to 80% of people with schizophrenia experience disturbed sleep. Sleep problems common to schizophrenia include abnormal or irregular sleep patterns. Individuals with schizophrenia don’t tend to sleep for one extended period overnight; instead, they are more prone to sleep at any point during the day or night...Because their sleep is so irregular, both in onset and in volume, their sleep quality also tends to be low. As a result, they’re less well-rested and prepared to cope with the symptoms of their disorder.” (Tuck)

Bipolar disorder and sleep. The sleep issues you face with bipolar disorder will be different depending on whether you are in a state of depression or mania.

“Sleeplessness is more common with episodes of mania. Distinct from insomnia, this describes the ability to go for long periods without sleeping, and without feeling a subjective need for sleep. Hypersomnia, or oversleeping, is more common during episodes of depression...Sleep apnea is significantly more common among individuals with bipolar disorder. The sleep-disordered breathing caused by sleep apnea disrupts their sleep, which can spark another manic episode or make it more difficult to cope during periods of depression. Whether caused by or independent of bipolar disorder, the sleep problems these individuals experience make it more difficult to cope with the symptoms of the disorder. The highs and sleeplessness associated with mania catch up with the individual during the resulting depression stage, during they worsen the overall hopelessness they feel. Meanwhile, lack of sleep prior to an episode of mania is one of the biggest warning signs that mania is about to occur. Even sleep deprivation from something as benign as jet lag can trigger an episode...They have more difficulties falling asleep and experience more interruptions to their sleep.” (Tuck)

As noted throughout, there are a lot of connections between mental health and sleep. It is important to note just how we can take steps towards better sleep. Staying away from electronics before bed is a good way to get to sleep in a better frame of mind. Also, mindfulness and meditation can be helpful guides towards better sleep. Whatever works for you, try to get better sleep. The more you sleep at night, the better off you will feel during the following day.

References:
