



Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 3: SLEEP YOURSELF WELL

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

**HEALTHHUB FOR
NEWCOMERS**



Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!

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MARCH: Sleep Yourself Well!



Sleep plays a vital role in our overall health; it allows our bodies to refuel and recharge physically and mentally and makes us feel both energized and rested when we wake up each day. With World Sleep Day and Safe Sleep Week both taking place this month, Living Well with AIMGA's March newsletter focuses on "sleeping yourself well" to highlight the importance of sleep and its impact on both your body and mind. A sufficient amount of sleep has been shown to be linked with not only our daily functioning and physical health (e.g., improved immunity, cardiovascular health, and lower overall mortality), but also our mental health, emotions, memory retention, and productivity. This content shares valuable and interesting information related to the science behind sleep, sleep disorders, and how to create and support healthy sleep routines and patterns so that you, too, can sleep yourself well!

SLEEPING WITH SCIENCE TED SERIES

Matthew Walker is a professor of neuroscience and psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, where he serves as the director of the Center for Human Sleep Science. Learn about several different topics found below!

1. [A Walk Through the Stages of Sleep](#)
2. [How Sleep can Improve Your Immunity](#)
3. [How Caffeine and Alcohol Affect Your Sleep](#)
4. [How Sleep Affects Your Emotions](#)
5. [Hacking Your Brain – With Sleep](#)
6. [What's the Connection Between Sleep and Alzheimer's Disease?](#)
7. [How to Deal with Your Insomnia — and Finally get to Sleep](#)
8. [Sleep is your superpower | Matt Walker](#)



"You should think of sleep as one of the best health insurance policies that you could ever wish for!" - Dr. Matthew Walker

SLEEP DISORDERS

Sleep disorders refer to “conditions that affect sleep quality, timing, or duration and impact a person’s ability to properly function while they are awake” (Sleep Foundation, 2022). Here are some common sleep disorders that people struggle with. It is important to note that if you feel you are suffering from any one of these conditions, that you consult a medical doctor to determine treatment options and next steps.

Click on the image for more information!



INSOMNIA

Insomnia is the most prevalent sleep condition which affects one’s ability to fall asleep, and/or stay asleep, and results in daytime impairment issues due to sleep deprivation ([Statistics Canada, 2018](#)). Extra Informational Video: <https://youtu.be/qSOBtp2rrTk>



RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME (RLS)

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a disorder that affects sensation and movement. People with this disorder have an unpleasant feeling or sensation in parts of their bodies when they lie down to sleep. Most people also have a very strong urge to move; sometimes movement helps them feel better, but it makes it hard or impossible to get enough sleep. Restless legs syndrome most commonly affects the legs, but it can cause unpleasant feelings in the arms or torso as well ([My Health Alberta, 2021](#)).



SLEEP APNEA

Sleep apnea is a disorder that causes your breathing to stop repeatedly while you sleep. These breathing pauses typically last 10-30 seconds and can happen many times throughout the night ([Health Canada, 2013](#)). There are several types of sleep apnea, with the most common being obstructive sleep apnea, which happens when the upper airway gets blocked during sleep. This blockage often occurs due to the soft tissue in the back of the throat collapsing and closing during sleep.



NARCOLEPSY

Narcolepsy (“narco” - put to sleep; “lepsy” - means seizure / attack) is a sleep disorder that is characterized by severe and persistent daytime sleepiness that can cause impairments in daily functioning and heighten the risk of serious accidents and injuries. Typical sleep patterns unfold through a series of stages, with rapid eye movement (REM) sleep occurring in the final stage (~1+ hours after falling asleep). However, for those with narcolepsy, REM sleep is irregular and often begins within minutes after falling asleep. REM occurs quickly in people with this disorder because of changes in the brain that disrupt how sleep works; this causes daytime sleepiness and other symptoms of narcolepsy.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Have you ever pulled an all-nighter? If you spend around 15-19 hours without sleep, you will behave as if you have a **blood alcohol level of 0.05**...which is comparable to being tipsy! Your reaction time becomes 50% slower and your accuracy also becomes very poor ([Bush, 2023](#); Olaithe, 2021; Williamson & Feyer).
- ~ 20% of Canadians have fallen asleep while driving a car. Feeling sleepy behind the wheel, or actually falling a sleep, causes around **21% of road accidents**. People who slept <6 hours were most likely to fall asleep when driving ([Bush, 2023](#)).
- 1 in 2 adults have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep; 1 in 5 adults do not find their sleep refreshing; 1 in 3 adults have difficulty staying awake during waking hours ([Government of Canada, 2019](#)).
- During dreaming sleep, your brain processes your daily events, converting the important ones into long-term memories, while also pruning away synapses your brain doesn't use often; this increases mind efficiency and effectiveness.
- Oversleeping and undersleeping are both detrimental to your health and increase your risk of all-cause mortality.
- Sleep is linked with the first two newsletter topics – mental health and heart health. Poor sleep reaps havoc on your stress hormones, making it harder for you to think straight and for you to maintain a good mood. Additionally, if you have disturbed sleep or sleep disorders such as insomnia, you are more likely to experience a cardiovascular episode ([Busko, 2023](#)).
- People with disturbed sleep don't wash metabolites out of their brain, and this builds up, putting one at a 7-27% higher risk of cognitive dysfunction and developing dementia later in life ([Olaithe, 2022](#)).



TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

[Check out this neat video](#) to learn more about the tips shared below: **6 Tips for Better Sleep**

- 1 Regularity:** keep a consistent sleep/wake schedule and make a “to bed alarm” just like you would make an alarm to wake up.
 - 2 Cool Temperature** – keep it cool in your sleep space (~18 degrees Celsius)
 - 3 Darkness:** we need darkness to trigger melatonin release, which helps regulate the healthy timing of sleep
 - 4 Walk it out:** don't stay in bed awake for long periods of time, if 25 min goes by and you can't fall asleep or get back to sleep after 25 min, get out of bed and go do something different; you need to break the association of bed with wakefulness – if you do this, the brain will relearn the association that the bed is a place for sleep
 - 5 Avoid Caffeine and Alcohol:** Avoid caffeine and alcohol in afternoon/evenings
 - 6 Wind down routine:** in the last hour or half hour before bed, do something relaxing and stick to this routine
- NOTE:** If you are suffering from a sleep disorder, such as insomnia or sleep apnea, you should seek a medical professional to determine next steps, as these tips may not help you.

HEALTH REMINDERS!

- **Maintain a safe living environment for individuals who sleepwalk** by keeping sharp objects or weapons locked away and out of reach; closing and latching doors and windows, etc. Do not wake up someone who is sleepwalking; a jolting awakening may provoke fear, confusion, or anger. If possible, try to gently guide a sleepwalking person away from potential dangers and back to bed with a quiet, soothing voice and at most a light touch.
- **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is preventable.** To reduce the risk of SIDS: promote back sleeping including nightly sleeping and naps; avoid smoking, alcohol, and drugs during pregnancy; set up a safe sleep surface and assemble cribs properly; share the bedroom with your infant sleeping in a crib or bassinet for 6-12 months; breastfeed your child, if possible, and remove soft bedding from your mattress before breastfeeding in bed; avoid breastfeeding on upright sofas and chairs; use a pacifier because research has shown that pacifier use in infants between 2 to 4 months of age can reduce the risk of SIDS ([Baby's Breath, 2016](#)); and sing the "Safe Sleep 7 Song" ([Healthline, 2021](#))
- **Melatonin** is a hormone that facilitates sleep onset; your brain produces melatonin in response to darkness and helps with your circadian rhythms. Profound research shows melatonin has small benefits for sleep onset but little evidence shows it is useful for sleep maintenance. In Canada, melatonin is sold over-the-counter (OTC), most commonly in the form of tablets. Given it is OTC, it is not as regulated; thus, the dosage can vary vendor to vendor, batch to batch. A typical melatonin dose for adults, is 1-5 mg, although some products are as low as 200 mcg or as high as 20 mg. This is why it is important to check the nutrition labels on these products for dosage information and to talk with your family physician about the proper dosage for you and the timing of taking melatonin. Remember, melatonin should not be a substitute for a good bedtime routine!
 - [Melatonin For Kids: What Parents Should Know This Sleep Aid.](#)
 - [Health Canada: Review of the Safety of Melatonin in Children and Adolescents](#)
 - [Is Melatonin a Good Sleep Aid?](#)
- **Magnesium** may help to relax muscles and nerve function and maintain levels of GABA (or gamma-aminobutyric acid), a neurotransmitter that is responsible for "turning off" wakefulness. It helps people fall asleep faster, stay asleep longer, reduce nighttime awakenings, and increase theory levels of naturally circulating [melatonin](#). You can make sure you have enough magnesium in your diet by eating whole grain foods, dried beans, and dark-green leafy vegetables. Additionally, low-fat milk and yogurt contains this mineral! If you are having trouble sleeping, ask your doctor about magnesium and whether magnesium supplements are an option for you.
 - [How Magnesium Can Help you Sleep](#)
 - [Should You Start Taking Magnesium For Sleep?](#)



HOT TOPIC:

Diving Into Dreams



What are Dreams?

A dream is a succession of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations that usually occur involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. Humans spend about two hours dreaming per night, and each dream lasts around 5 to 20 minutes, although the dreamer may perceive the dream as being much longer than this.

Dreaming mainly occurs during the REM (rapid eye movement) stage of sleep when brain activity is high and resembles that of being awake. People typically have multiple dreams each night that grow longer as sleep draws to a close. They typically involve elements from waking life, such as known people or familiar locations, but they also often have a fantastical feel like people living out scenarios that would never be possible in real life. Lucid dreaming is a state of dreaming where the dreamer is aware that they are asleep, but is able to control events within their dreams, to some extent. Lucid dreamers report willing themselves to fly, or do the impossible.

The History of Dream Interpretation

There is no consensus on the interpretation of dreams. Dream interpretation emerged in 1899 as a field of psychological study when Sigmund Freud published “The Interpretation of Dreams”. He theorized that dreams reflect the dreamer’s unconscious mind and that dream content is shaped by unconscious wish fulfillment. Today, most experts disagree with Freud’s conclusions, and some don’t believe dreams signify anything at all.

A study found that people attribute more importance to dream content than to similar thought content that occurs while they are awake. For example, people were more likely to report that they would intentionally miss their flight if they dreamt of their plane crashing than if they thought of their plane crashing the night before flying (while awake).

Why do we Dream?

This is still being studied, but the purpose may not be to send us messages about self-improvement or the future, as many historically believed. Some researchers now believe that dreaming mediates memory consolidation, problem solving, and mood regulation, a process a little like overnight therapy. People who are sleep deprived also tend to be dream-deprived, spending less time dreaming and perhaps not remembering dreams as well.

Nightmares

A nightmare is an unpleasant dream that can cause a strong negative emotional response from the mind, typically fear or horror, but also despair, anxiety, and great sadness. Sufferers usually awaken in a state of distress and may be unable to return to sleep for a prolonged period of time. Nightmares can create feelings of terror, anxiety, or despair, and lead to psychological distress or sleep problems, like insomnia. Research has identified a range of causes for nightmares, including post-traumatic stress and anxiety—especially the presence of generalized anxiety disorder, dissociation, and physiological changes.

Sources: [Psychology Today](#); [Medical News Today](#); [Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine](#)

MYTH OR FACT?

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

"Everyone needs 8 hours of sleep to be healthy"

"A good sleeper doesn't move at night"

"Your brain shuts down during sleep"

"It doesn't matter what time of day you sleep as long as you're getting enough hours."

"Getting too little sleep may lead to weight loss"

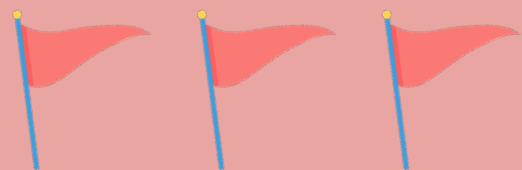


Check out this video to watch sleep expert, Matthew Walker, bust some more sleep myths! [Matthew Walker Busts Sleep Myths | Why We Sleep](#)

RED FLAGS

- If working shift work and awake for over 15 hours, CAB HOME or get a ride if you are feeling sleepy; it's not worth falling asleep at the wheel.
 - Occasional episodes of sleep walking aren't usually a concern, but if it is occurring quite often (1-2 times a week) and/or leading to dangerous behaviours or injury (e.g., trying to drive or leave the house), it's best to consult your doctor ([Mayo Clinic, 2017](#)).
 - The best way to stay on top of your sleep health is to watch out for sleep red flags that may mean you need to adjust the length or quality of your sleep. Sleep might seem like a complex beast to master, but it's more about knowing what the signs of fatigue are, and how to fix them. Here are five quick red flags to look out for.
- 1** You keep pressing snooze on your alarm every morning: If you press snooze every single morning, sometimes multiple times, or don't have the energy to leave your bed, you might need to go to sleep earlier, or you may need to tailor your sleep schedule in a different way.
 - 2** You always wake up tired, no matter how much you sleep: If you're constantly exhausted, no matter how many hours of sleep you get, it might be time to think about your physical health. Oversleeping is often an indicator that your body is worn down, or it may even indicate that your immune system is fighting off an illness. When you're getting a consistent 8+ hours of sleep every night, and it still isn't enough, then it's likely time to talk to your doctor about it.
 - 3** You rely on coffee to get through the day: Coffee can be good for your heart health (Harvard Health, 2020), but when you start to depend on coffee or other caffeinated beverages just to stay awake, this is problematic. Ask yourself if you'd be able to go through the day without a few cups of coffee. If you can't, it's time to pay more attention to your sleep cycle.
 - 4** You need to take naps to keep your energy levels up: If you're taking multiple cat naps throughout the day, then your current sleep schedule likely isn't doing it for you. Getting a good night's sleep, for most people, means that you shouldn't ever feel like you have to nap during the day. Although it's totally normal to want a snooze in the early afternoon, wanting to sleep all day long is a sign you're not getting enough sleep at night. Try cutting off caffeine by the afternoon, so that your body is ready for sleep come nighttime.
 - 5** You wake up with a sore throat, dry mouth, or headache: If you're constantly waking up with these symptoms, it may be a sign you're a chronic snorer, or you might have sleep apnea. One way to approach this problem is to change your sleep position so that you're sleeping on your side. Sleeping on your back encourages snoring and sleep apnea.

Sources: [Government of Canada, 2021](#); [Mayo Clinic, 2017](#)





IMG SPOTLIGHT

Gousia Durrani was born and raised in Kashmir, India. She graduated from medical school in Pakistan and worked as a Clinical Assistant/Educator in a Urology Clinic in Kashmir before moving to North America in 2015. Gousia settled in Calgary, Alberta, and she became involved with AIMGA in 2018. She was a participant in the first cohort of the Career Transition Program. Following this, Gousia got her first job in Canada as a COVID-19 case investigator and contact tracer in AHS. She is currently working as a Sleep Clinician in Calgary. In her role, she is primarily involved in educating patients on sleep-related disorders, especially Obstructive Sleep Apnea and testing (HSAT) and Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy.



Gousia Durrani

Skills gained from AIMGA:

AIMGA introduced me to new possibilities and helped reinforce the idea that we can achieve our goals as long as we are flexible, driven, and work as a team. One of the most valuable skills I learned was the insight that was given to me with respect to North American work culture.

Biggest lesson learned and advice for other IMGs:

Upskill and be flexible; with that combination you will achieve all your goals. There are opportunities waiting to be seized...good luck to all my fellow IMGs!



TIPS & RESOURCES

- [Celebrate healthy sleep on World Sleep Day – Mar. 17th](#)
- [Safe Sleep Week – March 13th -19th | \(Canada's First Annual Promotion\)](#)
- [Joe Rogan - ADHD & Sleep](#)
- [What is Alzheimer's Disease?](#)
- [Is Melatonin a Good Sleep Aid?](#)
- [How do Teenagers Sleep Differently?](#)
- [Sleep for Teenagers | Sleep Foundation](#)
- [What is Sleep Apnea](#)
- [Science of sleep. | Dr. Michelle Olathe | TEDxMandurah - YouTube](#)
- [Safe Sleep Tips – Baby's Breath Canada](#)
- [Good Sleep for Good Health | NIH News in Health](#)
- [Sleep Disorders – Common Types, Symptoms, Treatments | Sleep Foundation](#)
- [Sleep Talking: Causes, Treatment, and More \(healthline.com\)](#)
- [Tips to Sleep Better](#)

Organizations:
[Canadian Sleep Society, Sleep Foundation, Baby's Breath Canada](#)



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

March 8th marks **International Women's Day**, a day where women's social, economic, cultural, and political accomplishments should be recognized and celebrated world-wide! For International Women's Day and beyond, this year's goal and theme is to **#EmbraceEquity**. A focus on gender equity needs to be part of every society and organization's DNA. With that, it is critical to understand the [difference between equity and equality](#).

The goal of this year is to get the world talking about why equal opportunities aren't enough. People start from different places, so true inclusion and belonging requires equitable action!

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