

Psychology, sleep theories



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Theories of Sleep Order No. 327155 October ' 09 Theories of Sleep It was only in the twentieth century that the subject of sleep became a topic of interest and scientists began to research on the sleep process and explored some of the major problems associated with sleep. This paper will outline some of the basic facts about sleep such as the stages of sleep, the functions of sleep and sleep disorders.

Introduction

According to Martha S. Rosenthal, “ Sleep is a very important process and is characterized by a stereotypical posture, little movement, and a decrease in response to stimuli”. During sleep an individual is in a resting state and is relatively unaware of his surroundings. While asleep, most physiological functions of an individual such as blood pressure, heartbeat and rate of breathing decrease. It has been proved that in human beings, mammals, and a majority of other animals regular sleep is necessary in order to survive.

Stages of Sleep

Sleep is not a uniform process. Sleep happens in progressive stages, referred to as the sleep cycle (Tami Port, 2009). These stages show characteristic changes in the activity of brain. The cycle begins with light sleep, followed by deep sleep. Sleep is divided into two main stages, REM sleep and non-REM sleep. Here REM stands for " rapid eye movement". Non-REM sleep can be again divided into four stages. As sleep progresses from stage one to stage four, sleep becomes deeper. The third and fourth stages are often grouped together and are called slow wave sleep (SWS). When an individual is in SWS muscle and eye movements become less.

Functions of Sleep

Even though human beings spend almost one-third of their lives sleeping,

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one does not know exactly the functions of sleep. One of the major theories of sleep says that sleep is necessary for repair and restoration of the body as well as the mind. According to this theory sleep helps the body recover after an active day and gives the body the chance to restore substances that are lost while performing our daily duties. Another theory suggests that sleep has an adaptive function. According to this theory animals sleep because they need to protect themselves. However it is a known fact that sleep is a time to rest and rejuvenate and that it benefits us in many ways. When a person does not get the required amount of sleep he feels drowsy all the time, is not able to concentrate and is irritable . It has been proved that REM sleep is important for learning and memory.

Sleep Disorders

Many individuals complain of lack of or insufficient sleep. All of us at some time or the other have experienced this. However for many this problem is severe and chronic and may turn into a disorder forcing them to seek medical attention. Insomnia, drowsiness during the day, uncommon behavior during sleep are some of the disorders. Insomnia is the most common disorder. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine defines insomnia as unsatisfactory sleep that impacts daytime functioning.(Kalyanakrishnan Ramakrishnan , 2007))The symptoms of insomnia include difficulty in falling asleep, a short sleep cycle, frequent waking up during the night and non restorative sleep. The daytime symptoms include drowsiness, fatigue, depression, anxiety, and mood changes. Many causes are attributed to insomnia. Psychiatric disorders such as depression, respiratory diseases such as asthma and other chronic lung disease, chronic pain because of certain ailments like diabetes, arthritis are some of the common causes of insomnia.

Depending on the degree of insomnia a doctor advises treatment. If insomnia is severe and long lasting a doctor does a thorough evaluation to find out whether any existing medical or psychiatric illness is the cause of insomnia. Treatment ideally should first be non medicine therapy and the patient should be advised to exercise. In certain cases hypnotism is used but this should be for short periods only. It is advisable not to routinely use over-the-counter medicines that contain antihistamines.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that though many feel that sleep is a waste of time, sleep is an absolutely essential part of our lives and the lack of it may affect our daily lives. Lack of sleep or sleep deprivation can be dangerous. It can cause changes in our body which in turn may lead to diseases like diabetes, obesity and heart disease. It is dangerous not only to us but others as well. For instance it may affect our motor skills leading to accidents and disinterest in work.

References

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