

A SCIENTIFIC AYURVEDIC EXPLORATION OF CONCEPT OF SLEEP (NIDRA)

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ABSTRACT

Sleep plays a very essential role in our well being and good health throughout our life. If a person gets enough good quality and quantity of sleep in his/her day to day life, it provides many benefits including good health, good life span, protecting mental and physical health. During sleep, your body is working to support healthy brain functions and maintain your physical health. In children and teenagers, sleep also helps in growth and development of body and mind. Regular and good quality sleep is important for proper brain functioning, emotional wellbeing, physical health and daytime performances and activities. As we all know that adult needs 7-8 hours of sleep each night to be well rested. A night of good and relaxed sleep is incredibly important. In fact, it is as important as food to our body. Nowadays People are sleeping less than they used to did in past as a result sleep quality has decreased. Sleep is very important for various aspects of functions of brain. This includes cognition, memory, concentration, performance and productivity. Due to sleep deprivation many sleep disorders can occur such as anxiety, depression, stress etc. and poor memory, difficulty focusing, excessive daytime sleepiness, lethargy, tiredness, morning headaches etc. can occur. Sleep is just as vital to our growth and development as breathing air. No matter what age you are, sleep plays a role in helping your body reset, repair, and regenerate. In Ayurveda, *Nidra* (sleep) comes under tripod of life i.e. support or pillar of life.

Keywords: *Nidra*, Insomnia, hypersomnia

INTRODUCTION

Sleep is an unconsciousness from which the person can be aroused by sensory or other stimuli. Duration and requirement of sleep varies with age and individual. It varies from person to person. On an average a human subject sleeps for 1/3rd of his life¹. According to Ayurvedic view point, *Nidra* is functionally important. It is an essential

physiological phenomenon which occurs in our day to day life. Since it is a part of normal physiology, it gives rest and relaxation to our body, mind and senses, which gets tired and exhausted due to wear and tear process occurring in our daily life. When mind is exhausted and *indriyas* withdraw themselves from their object then the individual sleep². Hence,

nidra is considered as one of the essential components of life. In our classical texts, *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya* are given primary importance under tripod of life i.e. '*Trayopastambah*'. When these three are practiced well in our life, it will provide strength, complexion and compactness to the individuals' body³.

Nidra when taken properly in good quality and quantity will provide *Sukh* (happiness), *Pushti* (nourishment and growth), *Bala* (strength and immunity), *Vrishta* (potency and sexual vigor), *Gyaanam* (knowledge and intellect) and *Jeevitam* (good life span and longevity of life). On the other hand, an abnormal sleep in terms of quality and quantity (inadequate, excessive or irregular) will provide opposite qualities or the harmful effects i.e. *Dukh* (grief and misery), *Karshyam* (weakness or emaciation), *Abalam* (loss of strength and immunity), *Kleebata* (impotency and sterility), *Agyanam* (ignorance and non-intellect) and *Ajeevitam* (death)⁴.

Nidra has been described as one of three essential supports for the health. Both the less and excessive conditions of sleep are harmful to health. The three triads of life or the three supports i.e. *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya* designated as *Upstambhas* or the

secondary supports of life. Proper and undisturbed sleep is one of the most important factors of the life. *Acharya Charaka*, describes that happiness, misery, nourishment, emaciation, strength, weakness, virility, sterility, knowledge, ignorance, life and death. Like proper diet, proper sleep is also very essential for the maintenance of the body. The sleep when properly enjoyed, brings about happiness and longevity in human beings as the real knowledge brings about *siddhi* i.e. spiritual power in *yogi's*⁵. Sleeping and awakening in right and balanced quantity quality proceeds an individual towards happiness.

Nidra is a very important phenomenon which provides rest and relaxation to the body, mind and senses when they get tired and exhausted. When the mind including sensory and motor organs is exhausted and they dissociate themselves from their objects, then the individual sleeps.

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Hridaya* is the seat of consciousness and when it is dominated or covered by *tamas*, and then the person gets sleep⁶. It is a natural process.

TYPES OF SLEEP

Table 1: Different opinions of various Acharya's -

ACHARYA CHARAKA ⁷	ACHARYA SUSHRUTA ⁸	AACHARYA VAGBHATTA ⁹
1. <i>Tamobhava</i>	1. <i>Vaishnavi Nidra</i>	1. <i>Kalavabhawajanya Nidra</i>
2. <i>Shleshma-samudbhava</i>	2. <i>Tamsi Nidra</i>	2. <i>Aamayjanya Nidra</i>
3. <i>Manah-sharir-shrama-sambhava</i>	3. <i>Tamobhuyishtha Nidra</i>	3. <i>Chitta-khedajanya Nidra</i>
4. <i>Aagantuki</i>	5. <i>Satvabhuyishtha Nidra</i>	5. <i>Kaphajanya Nidra</i>
5. <i>Vyadhyanuvartini</i>	6. <i>Vaikariki Nidra</i>	6. <i>Aagantu Nidra</i>
6. <i>Ratrisvabhava-prabhava</i>		7. <i>Tamobhava Nidra</i>

SLEEP ACCORDING TO EACH DOSHAS

During the period of sleep, each individual will not experience the same type and same pattern of sleep. Each individual is different and can experience similar yet non-identical type of sleep.

- *Vata prakriti* person will experience light, irregular and short duration of sleep. However, *vata* person would benefit with more rest. Symptoms of teeth grinding, sleepwalking and sleep talking are common. Dreams tend to be airy in nature, he will see that he's flying in air

etc. Since *vata* types are light sleepers, they can easily wake during the night without being able to fall back asleep. *Vata*

- Dominant individuals often need 6-7 hours of sleep.
- **Pitta prakriti** person will experience sound sleep but also light. Generally, the amount of sleep is moderate, but they often forego sleep when preoccupied. Dreams tend to be wild, fiery, and vivid. Falling back asleep after waking up in the night is not troublesome. However, if the mind is overactive and stimulated, it will be difficult to fall back asleep. *Pitta* dominant individuals often need 7-8 hours of sleep to feel refresh.
- **Kapha prakriti** person will experience deep and sound sleep, heavy and stubborn. Meaning, they

are not easily disturbed or woken. They have a tendency to oversleep, even though they don't need to sleep for long periods.

Kapha people need 8-9 hours of sleep.

PERIOD OF SLEEP

One feels sleepy during the night because of the calm and quiet environmental conditions and increase of *tamas*. During day, bright light and various noises have stimulating effects and keep a person awake and alert. Similarly, *sattva* quality predominates and hence the person remains active.

Table 2: Duration of sleep, according to age is shown in the following table¹⁰:

AGES	HOURS OF SLEEP REQUIRED
Birth to 1 month	18-20 hrs.
1-6 months	15-18 hrs.
6 months – 1 year	14-16 hrs.
1-2 yrs.	12-14 hrs.
2-5 yrs.	10-12 hrs.
5-16 yrs.	9-10 hrs.
Adults	8 hrs.
Old persons	4-6 hrs.

Table 3: Requirement of sleep in *sattvika*, *rajasika* and *tamasika* persons are¹¹:

SATTVIKA PERSON	RAJASIKA PERSON	TAMASIKA PERSON
4-6 hours of sleep	8 hours of sleep	10-12 hours of sleep

EFFECT OF STAYING AWAKE AT NIGHT (RAATRI-JAAGRAN)

If a person keeps himself awake at night, it causes roughness in the body¹². Keeping awake at night increases *vata* and *pitta*. This causes complaints like-

- Constipation
- Weakness
- Giddiness
- Lack of concentration
- Hyperacidity
- Burning of eyes, hands and feet.

If, due to unavoidable reasons person has to keep awake at night, he should sleep during next morning, 4-5 hours before having food.

INDICATIONS FOR KEEPING AWAKE AT NIGHT:

- 1) Persons with *kapha* constitution and *kaphaja* disorders.
- 2) Obese persons
- 3) Persons who are poisoned
- 4) Persons taking diet rich in fat

INDICATIONS OF DAY SLEEP

Sleeping during the day time in the seasons other than summer is not advisable as it causes vitiation of *kapha* and *pitta*.

Table 4: Opinions of different Acharya's -

ACHARYA CHARAKA ¹³	ACHARYA SUSHRUTA ¹⁴	ACHARYA VAGBHATTA ¹⁵
<p>Sleeping during day time is indicated in -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People exhausted by singing, study, alcoholic, sexual acts, elimination therapy, carrying heavy weight, walking long distance. 	<p>Sleeping during day time –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is permissible for 48 minutes in case of children, aged, emaciated by sexual intercourse, wasted due to chest wound, alcoholic addicts 	<p>Sleeping during day time is indicated in-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons who are exhausted by long speaking, riding on animals or vehicles, walking long distances by enjoying excess drinks, sexual intercourse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those suffering from phthisis, wasting, thirst, diarrhea, colic pain, dyspnea, hiccup, insanity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those tired by riding, travelling in carriage or on foot and by hard work, those having not taken food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifting and carrying heavy weights, who are tired by anger, grief and fear. Who are afflicted by dyspnea, hiccup. Diarrhea.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who are too old, too young, weak and emaciated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffering from deficiency of fat, sweat, <i>kapha</i>, <i>rasa</i> and blood and having indigestion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old, children, weak, emaciated, injured, thirsty, have pain, indigestion, are wounded and insane.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who are injured by fall and assault, those who are exhausted by journey by a vehicle, vigil, anger, grief and fear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day-sleep is also desirable for half the normal period in case of those having awoken in night. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who are accustomed to day-sleep.

CONTRA-INDICATIONS OF DAY SLEEP

Table 5: Opinions of various Acharya's-

ACHARYA CHARAKA ¹⁶	ACHARYA SUSHRUTA ¹⁷	ACHARYA VAGBHATTA ¹⁸
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with excessive fat, people who are addicted to taking unctuous substances, those with <i>sleshmic</i> constitution, those suffering from <i>dushivisha</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day-sleep is contra-indicated in all seasons except summers, in these too, it is permissible for a muhurta (48minutes) in some cases mention under indications of sleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons who are very much fatty and have <i>kapha</i>-predominancy • Who are habituated to oleation should not sleep during day time.

DISEASES CAUSED DUE TO UNWHOLESOME SLEEP (*AHITANIDRA*)

Table 6: Diseases which could result due to unwholesome sleep-

ACHARYA CHARAKA ¹⁹	ACHARYA SUSHRUTA ²⁰	ACHARYA VAGBHATTA ²¹
<p>If person sleeps at day time then it leads to-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serious type of jaundice (<i>halimaka</i>) 	<p>If person sleeps at day time, then it leads to-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People become victim of unrighteousness and aggravation of all <i>doshas</i> which give rise to disorders. 	<p>If a person sleeps at day time, then it leads to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Halimaka</i>, dullness of head, <i>stamitya</i> (numbness), feeling of heaviness of the body

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • headache, timidness, heaviness of the body, malaise, loss of digestive power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorders are- cough, dyspnea, coryza, heaviness in head, body-ache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever, giddiness, loss of intellect, obstruction of body channels, dyspepsia, swelling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hridyoplepa</i>, edema, anorexia, nausea, rhinitis, hemicrania, urticaria, eruption, abscess, pruritis, drowsiness, coughing, disease of throat, impairment of the memory and intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anorexia, fever and poor digestion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anorexia, nausea, running nose, hemicrania, itching, pain, rashes, eruptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstruction of the circulating channels of the body, fever, weakness of sensory and motor organs and enhancement of toxic effects of artificial poisons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who awake in night suffer from the same complications caused by <i>vata</i> and <i>pitta</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cough, lassitude, throat-disorders, progress of the action of poisons.

SUPPRESSION OF SLEEP

Table 7: Suppression of sleep causes various problems as described by various acharya's are as follows:

ACHARYA CHARAKA ²²	ACHARYA VAGBHATTA ²³
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yawning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body ache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of heaviness of the head and eyes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drowsiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lassitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much of yawning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heaviness in the eyes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squeezing pain all over the body.

INSOMNIA (*ANIDRA*)

It is also known as sleeplessness, is a sleep disorder where people have trouble sleeping. They may have

difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep as long as desired.

CAUSES OF INSOMNIA

Table 8: Causes of insomnia

ACHARYA CHARAKA ²⁴	ACHARYA SUSHRUTA ²⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of <i>doshas</i> from the body and head through purgation and emesis • Fear, anxiety, anger, smoke, physical exercise, bloodletting, fast, uncomfortable bed • Predominance of <i>sattva</i> and suppression of <i>tamas</i> go a long way towards overcoming the sleep-in excess. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imbalance of <i>vata</i> and <i>pitta doshas</i> and mental stress are the causes of insomnia.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Along with overwork, old age, diseases, especially these due to vitiation of <i>vata</i> like colic pain etc. • Old age usually causes sleeplessness. • Some people suffer from sleeplessness by nature. 	

EFFECTS OF INSOMNIA²⁶

According to *Acharya Vagbhatta* in *Ashtanga Hridaya sutrasthana*, the effects of insomnia are:

1) Squeezing pain in the body parts

2) Heaviness of the head

3) Yawning

4) Lassitude

5) Exhaustion

- 6) Giddiness
- 7) Indigestion

- 8) Stupor
- 9) Diseases caused by excess of *vata*.

TREATMENT OF INSOMNIA

Table 9:

ACHARYA CHARAKA ²⁷	ACHARYA SUSHRUTA ²⁸	ACHARYA VAGBHATTA ²⁹
1. Oil massage and application of sandalwood paste to the head and face.	1. Massage, head-oil, anointing and mildly pressing the body.	1. Good sleep and mild massage are the ideal treatment.
2. Unction, bath, intake of soup of domestic marshy and aquatic animals	2. In diet, person should take sweet and unctuous food consisting of edibles made of <i>shali</i> rice, wheat and rice flour processed with products of sugarcane along with milk, meat-soup etc.	2. Person should indulge in the use of milk, wine, meat soup and curds, oil massage and mild squeezing of the body.
3. <i>shali</i> rice with curd, milk and unctuous substance	3. In night, he should take <i>draksha</i> , sugar and sugarcane products.	3. Bath, anointing the head, ears and eyes with nourishing oils, harbouring the feeling of satisfaction and resorting to things which are comforting to the mind as much as desired. These bring about the pleasure of good sleep.
4. Alcohol, psychic pleasure, smell of scents and hearing of sounds of one's own choice, rubbing the body by hands.	4. Person should use bed. Seat and carriage and other things agreeable and soft.	
5. Comfortable bed, home, proper time of sleep.		

GOOD AND BAD SLEEP

According to Acharya Charaka in *Sutrasthana*, the sleep caused by the nature of the night is the sleep par excellence; this is known as *bhutadhatri* (that nurses all the living beings). The one caused by *tamas* is the root cause of the entire sinful act. *Tamas* always causes excessive sleep. Thus, the individual is unable to perform the virtuous rites and so he subjects himself to sinful behavior. The *agantuki* type of sleep is caused as a complication of an incurable disease and as such it is in itself incurable. The remaining types are to be treated as diseases.

HYPERSOMNIA OR EXCESS OF SLEEP (ATINIDRA)

Hypersomnia is a neurological disorder of excessive time spent in sleeping or excessive sleepiness.

According to our classical texts, it leads to obesity and diseases due to increased *kapha dosha*, such as diabetes.

TREATMENT OF EXCESSIVE SLEEP³¹

According to Acharya Sushruta in *Sharirsthana*, in case of excessive sleep, person can be treated by evacuative measures particularly emesis, lightening, blood-letting and mind-agitating.

Other treatments:

- 1) Fasting
- 2) Induction of sweating
- 3) Instillation of strong nasal drops or smelling of snuff
- 4) Application of strong eye ointment
- 5) Purgation

WAYS TO PROMOTE SLEEP

There are different ways to promote sleep which will help in maintenance of good health. These are **Pranayama, meditation and yoga.**

Meditation: Meditation is effective for all *doshas* and helps to set the mind, body, and soul in a calm and relaxed state. Meditation is a state of equilibrium between body and mind. Any form of meditation can be practiced. The simplest one is breath awareness meditation, where one focuses on his or her breath, inhale and exhale without letting the mind wander towards the thoughts that may arise. Focusing on the breath, instead of the day's events or concerns will help you relax. This type of meditation really helps to relax mind, body and soul and when these three are relaxed person feels fresh and relaxed and will experience good sleep which in turn promotes good health. Person should practice very regularly and at a fixed time in morning before sunrise and in the evening after sunset. Meditation should be practiced at a proper and fixed place. The person should forget distractions as far as possible when he sits for the practice of meditation.

Yoga: Yoga is the science of healthy and better living; physical, mental, moral, intellectual and spiritual. Yoga has now been applied as a routine practice for physical and mental fitness. Incorporate gentle restorative yoga poses. *Surya namaskara* is a routine that promotes relaxation and calms the mind, body, and soul.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of above description, it can be concluded that proper sleep at proper time is very essential for the growth and development of the body and mind. Sleep is very necessary for the well-being of a person's life. Sleep is a state when both the mind and the body are at rest. By emphasizing an appropriate routine and timings of the day's natural cycle, we can promote the sleep state, and, in turn, promote health.

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