

sleepiness

—Komolafe, Sleep expert

Director Neurology Unit, Department of Medicine, Obafemi Awolowo University, OAU, Dr Morenikeji Komolafe speaks on the significance of sleep as the world marks World Sleep Day in this interview with SADE OGUNTOLA, indicating that poor sleep is associated with several negative physical and psychiatric consequences, including poor memory.

WHY do we need sleep and why should it be taken seriously?

Good sleep is necessary for optimal health; it is important for renewing our mental and physical health. Why do we need sleep? When we are awake, a chemical called adenosine builds up in the bloodstream.

It is only when we are asleep that the body is able to break this chemical down and if you don't get enough sleep your body won't have enough time to break down the chemical. The result is a slowdown in your reactions, feeling generally tired and wanting to have a nap.

How much sleep we need varies between individuals but generally changes as we age. Although it is not just about the hours of sleep, the quality of sleep also matters. Most adults need an average of eight hours per night to feel rested. Babies, however, need more hours of sleep (16 to 18 hours of each 24 hours).

There are at least 84 disorders of sleeping that lead to a reduced quality of life and per-

sonal health. But the common ones include snoring, sleep apnea, insomnia, sleep deprivation, and restless legs syndrome.

Most of us have experienced trouble sleeping at one time or another. This is normal and usually temporary, due to stress or other outside factors. But if sleep problems are a regular occurrence and interfere with one's daily life, this is termed sleep disorder.

Unfortunately, sleep disorders cause more than just sleepiness. Even minimal sleep loss can take a toll on the mood, energy, efficiency, and ability to handle stress. Ignoring sleep problems and disorders can lead to poor health, weight gain, accidents, impaired job performance, and relationship strain.

What are the common signs of sleep disorder?

Sleep disorders can differ depending on the severity and type of sleeping disorder. They may also vary when sleep disorders are a result of another condition. However, sleep disorders can manifest as an inability to sleep (insomnia), daytime sleepiness, abnormal movements or behaviour during sleep, or an inability to sleep at the appropri-

cause exposure to light from various devices like Neon light, street signs, mobile phones, I-pads and laptop affects melatonin secretion from pineal gland. I have seen many teenagers and young adult having problems sleeping because of spending too much time on these devices.

Medical issues like allergies, colds, and upper respiratory infections can make it challenging to breathe at night. The inability to breathe through the nose can also cause sleeping difficulties. Frequent urination during the night, constant pain from disease such as arthritis and persistent headache can make good night sleep difficult.

Approximately 75 to 85 per cent of menopausal women experience hot flashes, which can last for five years. Hot flashes and sweating can make it difficult to sleep. Also, in the years after menopause, women's sleep grows lighter and more fragmented. This change in sleep pattern causes more daytime fatigue.

About half of all adults over the age of 65 have some sort of sleep disorder. As we age, our bodies become less skilled at maintaining sound sleep. Older persons get less of the deeper stages of sleep and tend to awaken more often due to medical illness, medications, alcohol, depression and loss of a loved one.

World over, insufficient sleep is increasingly recognized as important to public health, with sleep insufficiency linked to motor vehicle crashes, industrial disasters, and medical and other occupational errors.

Unintentionally falling asleep, nodding off while driving, and having difficulty performing daily tasks because of sleepiness all may contribute to these hazardous outcomes. Persons experiencing sleep insufficiency are also more likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, depression, and obesity, as well as from cancer, and reduced quality of life and productivity.

of sleep disorders and their better understanding and preventability, and to reduce the burden of sleep problems on society through better prevention and management of sleep disorders.

With the advent of round the clock social media habits, binge watching marathons and the usual insomniac traits, many people are losing out on sleep. This can actually be very harmful for health. In fact, problems of sleep have reached the level of global epidemic and it threatens health and quality of life of as much as 45 per cent of world's population.

Nonetheless, sleep maladies can be ameliorated, but recognition has to come first, emphasising the importance of overall health and well-being. Most sleep disorders are preventable or treatable, yet less than one-third of sufferers seek professional help. People should not have to live with poor sleep. Good sleep is achievable.

So what can people do to ensure good sleep?

Good sleep is reachable if attention is paid to life style and environmental factors. Tips getting better sleep include the following:

- Maintain a regular wake time, even on days of work and weekends and trying to go to bed only when you are drowsy.
- Avoid stimulating activities late in the evening such as heavy studying, computer games, violent or frightening television shows, books or videos.
- Avoid products with caffeine such as soft drinks, kola nut and coffee after 4pm.
- Exercise regularly and use bed room for only sleep, sex and time of illness. Do not do your work or worry on the bed.
- Keep regular schedule- regular times for meals, medications, chores and other activities. Avoid large meals at night as well as napping during the day.
- Establish relaxing pre-night rituals such as a warm bath and light bed time snack.