

The connection between healing and sleep studied

16 February 2011, By Sandra Pysklywyc

There's an Irish proverb that says, "A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book," and recent work by U of A researcher Cary Brown shows merit to this idea.

Her most recent research includes finding non-pharmacological solutions for children with chronic health issues. In particular, Brown is looking at the effects of sleep problems on kids.

While getting a good night's sleep sounds like a straightforward component to the healing process, Brown says there isn't enough research available to help address this issue. "The lack of restorative sleep has not been fully examined in terms of its impact on children with chronic health conditions."

Research shows health-care providers in general do not consider the effects of [sleep deprivation](#) on children with chronic health conditions and if they have, there are few resources to assist both them and parents with intervention strategies. Brown's recent survey of occupational therapists found the same thing.

In response to that survey and her ongoing research in the areas of pain and sleep, Brown developed a website to arm occupational therapists, parents and even children with information about how sleep deprivation affects children with chronic health issues.

Strategies for intervention, health-care resources and assessment tools for providers are all available on this site.

Brown cites a number of resources on the Internet that she says are very valuable. Her aim was to pull these sources, along with her research, into one convenient location and empower the website's users to take control of their own issues, "because they know there is a problem, but don't know where to get more information."

Brown also wants to dispel the myth that poor sleeping habits are a phase that all kids go through. She says that, "some kids progress out of it, but when a child has a health condition, it's difficult for he or she to grow out of it and the habits become more entrenched."

While it sounds simple, getting a good night's sleep may in some cases require intervention strategies.

For example, Brown notes a simple place to start is with proper sleep hygiene-the habits, environmental factors, and practices that may influence the length and quality of one's sleep, such as bedtime, nighttime rituals and disruptions to one's sleep.

Brown recommends parents consider factors like whether the environment is quiet enough to sleep and if there's a set bed time, to determine if something could be inhibiting their child's sleep. Other factors that can disrupt the sleep patterns include body temperature, light and noise.

"Health-care providers can't always guide people as to what they can do for themselves in terms of restorative sleep," says Brown. "The idea of sleep deprivation is not commonly imbedded in the health-care curriculum. We have a wealth of research showing children's physical and emotional health, development and ability to learn are all negatively affected by sleep. Once health-care providers are aware of this issue, they are eager to find [sleep](#) solutions to promote health and function."

For Brown, her hope is that the website will assist those who need it with non-pharmacological strategies for sleep-deprived children with chronic health concerns.

Provided by University of Alberta

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