

AYURVEDIC VIEW ON SLEEP (NIDRA): A PILLAR OF HEALTH - A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Nidra (Sleep) is an important and essential phenomenon of life which affects the body and mind equally in a favourable way when it is enjoyed in a right manner. Acharya Charaka gives special emphasis on trayopastambha (Three Pillars) for the maintenance of life and health. They are Ahara (Food), Nidra (Sleep) and Brahmacharya (Good conduct). Among these nidra affects both physical and mental factors equally. Nidra is the time when the body is able to repair and heal itself. The mind and emotions are also balanced through nidra. Therefore nidra is explained as an essential for all living beings. For humans to be able to function optimally, quality sleep is required. Ayurveda has mentioned about Nidra (Sleep) with Swapna (Dreams) and without Swapna before the modern scientific world described about Rapid Eye Movement (REM) and Non Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) sleep. Due to changed life style man has least importance to sleep. Recent research indicates that pervasive sleep deprivation can lead to more serious health problems. Quality sleep acts as rejuvenator of body and mind, enabling as to function at peak levels during our working hours.

Keywords: Nidra, Sleep, Trayopasthamba, Health

INTRODUCTION

It has been observed all living beings enjoy nidra (Sleep) to keep their body and mind energetic. Nidra is a harmonious gift of nature. Sleep is physiological process occurring in every indi-

vidual. Restful sleep is foundation for physical and mental well being. Man also sleeps during day time, but it is not considered as nidra. According to Monnier Williams Sanskrit diction-

ary, nidra is “Dadrushu naish (Nisha)” meaning, the phenomenon which occurs during the night. Ayurveda has included nidra in trayopastmabha, as it is one of the most essential factors responsible for health and fulfilled life.¹

Nidra is one among the trayopstamba (Three pillars of life) or the great support pillar on which the health of a person is firmly balanced. Among these upastambhas, ahara is mainly related with physical factors, brahmacharya related with mental factors while nidra has psychosomatic approach. Nidra is one among the life maintaining factors and if not used properly several diseases may occur, but if it is practiced according to the prescribed regimen, it provides Sukha i.e. Arogya. Nidra is considered as Brumhana (Nourishing) and it promotes health by nourishing dhatus.¹

Definition of Nidra:

Acharya charaka, has said that when mind gets exhausted or becomes inactive, sense organs cannot perceive their objects and there remains nothing to feed the mind. In this status, individual gets sleep.²

According to sushrutha sleep occurs when the hridaya (heart), the seat of chethana (Activity) is covered by Tamas.³

Vagbhata has said that in manovaha srotas, due to accumulation of kapha dosha, mind is devoid of sense organs because of fatigue, then individual falls sleep.⁴

Chakrapanidatta and Gangadhara, the commentators of Charaka Samhitha explained that when the mind (along with aatma) gets exhausted or becomes inactive and sensory and motor organs become inactive then individual gets sleep.

From the Vedic & Upanishads period, the yogis have studied the yogic sleep phenomenon pertaining to various stages associated with aatma, they have termed these stages as

1. Jagratvastha (Working phase)
2. Swapnavastha (Dream phase)
3. Suptavastha (Sleep face)
4. Samadivastha (The Conscious sleep phase having detachment from the eternal world)

In Patanjali yoga sutra, nidra has been described as, it is a non- deliberate absence of thought waves or knowledge.⁵ Also it is the natural periodic suspension of consciousness during which the powers of the body is restored.

Synonyms:

Shayanam, swapa, swapna, supti and samvesha

Types of Nidra:

Various acharyas have given different opinions regarding the types of nidra. Basically the nidra can be of two types:

1. Swabhavika (Natural) – It occurs regularly every night
2. Aswabhavika (Abnormal)- May be due to different causes like diseases etc

Acharya Charaka has described 6 types of Nidra:⁶

1. Tamobhava – caused by tamo guna
2. Shleshma samudhbhava – caused by kapha
3. Mana shareera shrama bhava – caused by mental and physical exertion
4. Agantuki – indicative of bad prognosis leading to immediate death
5. Vyadhianuvastini – caused as complication of disease
6. Ratri swabhava prabhava nidra – natural phenomenon during night

Among these, ratri swabhava prabhava nidra is called as bhootha dhatri because nidra nourishes all living beings like dhatri.

Seven types of Nidra⁷:

1. Kalaswabhava: During night as a natural phenomenon
2. Amaya : Caused by disease
3. Chitta Kheda : Caused by mental exertion

4. Deha Kheda : Caused by physical exertion
5. Kaphaja : Due to Kapha
6. Agantuja : Due to injury
7. Tamobhava : Due to tamo guna

Three types of sleep ⁸:

1. Vaishnavi (Swabhavika) : As a natural phenomenon during night
2. Tamasi : Due to tamo guna
3. Vaikariki : Due to disease etc

Ayurvedic texts also recognize the three conditions of sleep but, explain them as due to the operation of three gunas ⁹

1. In presence of satva guna – wakefulness state
2. In presence of rajo guna – dream state
3. In presence of tamo guna – sleeping state

Physiology of sleep:

When manas is exhausted then sleep occurs. This phenomenon can be understood as, sleep is due to cerebral ischemia. Cerebral cortex is the seat of higher centers like pre and posts central gyres, association area etc¹⁰, which has correlation mental activities as described in classics. Due to reduction in blood supply, manas become klantha which causes sleep. During sleep the indriyas (Both Jnanendriya and karmendriya) become inactive due to detachment from their sense organs or from which they work.

Benefits of nidra ¹¹:

If we get quantity and quality sleep, then it is as beneficial as good food or nutrition, it provides

- Sukha (wellness)
- Pushti (nourishment)
- Bala (strength)
- Vrishata (potency)
- Jnana (knowledge)
- Jiva (life or longevity)

Inadequate sleep leads to

- Dukha (illness)
- Karshya (emaciation)
- Abalam (weakness)
- Kleebatha (impotency)
- Ajnana (ignorance)
- Marana (death)

Lack of sleep leads to increased vata this in turns leads to yawning, body aches, loss of concentration and digestion problems. By having proper and adequate nidra the person will be free from diseases, will have pleasure in mind endowed with strength, colour, complexion and virility.¹² Comfortable nidra is essential for milk production prasoota stree¹³. It is also best for alleviating pitta dosha ¹⁴.

During sleep sympathetic activity decreases while parasympathetic activities sometimes increases therefore the blood pressure falls, pulse rate decreases, BMR falls by 10% to 20%, skin vessels dilates and activity of GI tract sometimes increases.

Disorders are causing due to improper sleep or agni mandhya, ajeerna, amla pitta, vibhanda. It also affects the nervous system causing mental disorders like lack of concentration, insomnia, inability to concentrate, poor judgement, memory problems, mood disturbances, anxiety and disturbances.

Duration of sleep:

Different people needs different time periods of sleep and at different times in their lives. On average we spend about 1/3rd of our lives in sleeping. Infants and children need more sleep, due to kapha predominance, adults need an average as it is Pitta dominant stage and elders sleep very less because of vata prakopa. According to deha prakruthi, kapha prakruthi people

sleep more, pitta prakruthi a little less and vata prakruthi people sleep the least.

Duration of sleeping is not important; quality sleep is needed for good health. Quality sleep is defined as uninterrupted sleep over a period of approx seven to nine hours per night.

Timing of Sleep:

- A night sleep is considered the best. Divaswapna or day sleep is contraindicated because it aggravates kapha because of abhishyandhatvam and also leads to indigestion which in turn leads to ama in the body and also even promotes sthoulya (Obesity).
- It is advisable for the people who work in night shifts to have a light breakfast followed by sleep, for half the duration they are supposed to sleep during night. Once they wake up, they can have their main meal, and can engage in their daily routine.
- During Greeshma ritu (Summer season), one can sleep during the day time
- People who are exhausted by long term speech, travel, intoxication, physical exertion, anger, grief, aged, children and the weak due to diseases can sleep during day time. It is also advised during pregnancy and post partum¹⁵
- If at all anyone wants to sleep during day time, it is better to sleep before lunch than to sleep after lunch.

Things to be followed for a good sleep:

1. Keep a regular sleep schedule
 - a. Set a regular bed time
 - b. Wake up at the same time everyday
 - c. Nap to make up for lost sleep
 - d. Be smart about napping, it is a good way to recharge (Limit it to 30 minutes)
2. Naturally regulate your sleep wake up cycle

- a. Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone controlled by light exposure that helps to regulate your sleep wakeup cycle
- b. The bright light at nights especially from hours spent in front of TV, computer screens and smart phones can suppresses body's production of melatonin and make it harder to sleep. These electronic gadgets also stimulate the mind, rather than relaxing it.
3. Get anxiety and stress in check. Residual stress, worry, and anger from your day can make it very difficult for you to sleep well. so it is wise to be free from anxiety and stress
4. Hearing soft music or favorite songs
5. Avoid smoking, tea, coffee, alcohol at night before going to bed
6. 5-10 minutes of meditation before going to bed
7. Offering prayers to the almighty before going to the bed
8. Proper evacuation of stool and urine
9. Drinking a cup of milk before going to bed

Following Dinacharya like Anjana, Shiroabhyanga, Nasya, Sneha Gandusha, Yoga, Vyayama, Sadrvitta palana, Acharya rasayana and Ritu shodhana are also beneficial for getting good sleep.¹⁶

Here Anjana, Shiroabhyanga, Nasya and Sneha Gandusha reduces Vata Dosha. Thereby induces good sleep.

Daily following Yoga, Vyayama, Sadrvitta palana, Acharya Rasayana and ritu shodana keeps all doshas in equilibrium and reduces stress by keeping mind in Prashantha sthithi, thereby inducing good sleep.

CONCLUSION

Sleep is the state where both body and mind are at rest. Health and longevity is conquered by proper sleep due to its importance it has been mentioned as one of trayopastambhas. Quality sleep acts as rejuvenator of body and mind, enabling us to function at peak levels during working hours. It is the best elixir anabolic event which is time to rebuild and reconstruct the body. Proper sleep leads to deha bala pushti (nourishes and strengthens the body) and the same way indulging in improper leads to vikara. To combat lifestyle disorders and lead a healthy life, ideal nidra is very important.

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