



## Sleep

**While we sleep, our body takes care of tasks that it cannot fulfill during our daytime activities because it is needed elsewhere: our brain sorts out the information collected during the day, our cells renew allowing growth for children, thinning or stocking fat for adults and many other different scarring and healing processes.**

As far as I can remember, I've always had trouble falling asleep. When I was a child, these problems were linked, in part at least, to nocturnal anxieties. I was scared of the dark so much that I had to put my blankie on the ear which was not placed on my pillow to muffle the sounds of the monsters prowling under my bedroom. Of course, I couldn't figure out where those monsters came from or what they wanted from me, but since they appeared after my parents' divorce, it didn't take much analytical effort on my part to make the connection when I reached adulthood .

As a teenager, my sleep problems persisted and grew with my anxieties, the nature of which was, at that time, were more easily identifiable. My mother also had problems falling asleep: she explained to me at that time that it was our anxieties that prevented us from falling asleep and that there was nothing to do about it because we were made this way, period. For her part, she had started taking sleeping pills every night to handle that issue and has never stopped since.

As a very obvious consequent result, it took me quite a long time to understand that it was not my anxieties that prevented me from sleeping but a dysfunction of my body on top of which my anxieties had settled. During my depression, I treated my anxieties, which highlighted several of my personality aspects which were hidden by them concerning sleep:

- The first reason I didn't easily fall asleep was that I never really wanted to sleep in the first place



because I always felt that I hadn't had enough of the current day joys and pleasures yet. I tamed this part by accepting that, at some point of the day, my body was just too tired to start a new activity and that other equally wonderful ones were awaiting me the next day.

- The second was that I had a physiological problem related to falling asleep. Indeed, my body simply didn't secrete enough melatonin (sleep hormone), which induced waiting periods for slumber to come that could last up to 2 hours; I thus lost one to two hours of sleep each night. By listening to my body, I became also aware that this problem was hormone-dependent; a week before my period, I had 2 to 3 nights in a row almost without any sleep, whatever my state of fatigue was.

Of all the doctors and psychologists I have consulted over the years, none have ever told me that this hormonal phenomenon or a possible melatonin secretion weakness could exist. Whereas, all of them, without exception, gave me the same speech my mother had, that is to say that my problem was linked to anxieties and that I had to improve myself on this matter. I thus worked on that issue and it did help me but without producing miracles: I learned relaxation exercises to empty my mind, exercises to concentrate on my belly breathing, thus bypassing my brain in the process, as well as techniques of breathing to replicate sleep breathing, before I started meditation several decades later.

I also learned to recognize my sleep schedule which occurs at 10:30 p.m., 11:30 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. If I miss one of those sleep trains by fifteen minutes, I have to wait for the next one to be able to fall asleep. I now also know how to recognize the signs that accompany them and tell me my body is ready to sleep: my body temperature drops inducing very specific chills and my eyes tingle.

Of course, the same doctors have, at regular intervals, offered me to take sleeping pills which I have always declined, having been able to see firsthand daily sleeping pills taking results on my mother; it significantly aggravated her mood swings and kept her in a deep depression state throughout her life. In addition, as she had given me some, thinking it would help me, at times when I had trouble sleeping, I could see that I preferred daytime fatigue of a sleepless night rather than a full day lost in the foggy fumes of sleeping pills.

I also tried herbs to help me fall asleep, but since my sleeping problem is not stress induced, it didn't do much good for me.

What really solved my problem in the long term was melatonin sale becoming legal on the market, this damn substance that my body does not secrete in sufficient quantities. I now take 1mg of melatonin every night - except during my periods when I'm forced to increase the dose to 1.5 mg for a very light quality sleep -, I fall asleep almost instantly most of the time. Even though the molecule is chemical, it compensates for my body deficiency, like insulin for diabetes. Up to this day, I have not detected any side effects related to this molecule, neither daytime drowsiness nor dependence; if I stop taking it, I just go back to needing 1 to 2 hours to fall asleep.

My sleep problem is genetic. My mother has the same, which she has never been able to identify for lack of tools at her disposal, and, unfortunately, my daughter has the same too. My daughter is too



young to take melatonin because her body has not finished developing its hormonal balance but we keep trying other methods in the meantime such as homeopathy, herbs and relaxation, but she is not very receptive to all this at the moment.

What is important to remember from this story is that, if I had not learned to listen to and understand my body, if I had not been curious and attentive to its functioning, no one would have brought me any solution, because, ultimately, each body is unique and even competent doctors can only treat with the general knowledge they learned in medical school – and the many cases that they have encountered in their career – and cannot always guess each body specificities.

**How could a doctor guess a dysfunction in our body if even we are not able to explain it to him/her or, at the very least, to put him/her on a track? The rest that slumber offers us is essential to our well-being and our body proper development. Once again, it is through self-knowledge that we can manage to repair ourselves or compensate for the failures in our body. There is no single answer to our disorders but a specific answer to each human being.**