

## Module 16 Transcript

### Treatment for Sleep Disorders

*The Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, which is--well--what it sounds like, reports not only that sleep disorder diagnoses are at an all-time high in both developed and developing nations across the world, but that over the past decade, the rate has been increasing dramatically. With that in mind, it's less than surprising that a growing number of people are seeking both traditional and less-than-traditional treatments. But are these different treatments helping us get the sleep our bodies need, or are they simply subbing in for true rest?

Benzodiazepines. Trazadone. Zolpidem. Ramelteon. All prescription drugs that all target different areas of the brain yet all have the same goal: help a person to fall asleep and stay asleep. Roughly one in five people take regular sleep aids, and that number increases to one in three for older age demographics. Look, the reality is that people use medications because they often work, and because the effects are desirable over the alternatives, so it's easy to see why these solutions are appealing.

And I'm not anti-medication, obviously. I prescribe them, and they do help a lot of people, particularly those struggling with severe cases of insomnia and oftentimes in the initial phases of treatment for depression and anxiety when patients need better sleep to improve their health. As a doctor, one of my first priorities in treating a patient who's struggling is making sure that that patient can get to sleep. And, quite honestly, these medications can be good at doing just that. But there are some concerns to be aware of when we're looking at the rising rates of medication usage. Number one is the side effects, which are a factor with virtually any medication.

Take Ambien, for example, which accounts for tens of thousands of emergency room visits every year due to accidents caused by its lingering effects. The FDA actually changed the dose recommendation for women in because it is metabolized more slowly by women

## Module 16 Transcript

making the drive to school or work more dangerous. Add to that the high price of these medications, we come to the obvious conclusion: these should not be our first treatment option when it comes to helping our brains properly rest and get good sleep.

Certainly, many people try over the counter remedies. Many supplements, and holistic medicines, give vague promises about better sleep, but the data is mixed, to say the least. We will talk about some of the supplements that can help with sleep, but the most important piece I see people missing is their own detailed version of sleep hygiene. So often in my practice, when I hear about someone's sleep challenges, I quickly hear about some easy solutions, like dimming the lights earlier in the evening. I remember one of the first patients I spoke with about sleep – she had a child that was having a hard time settling down at night, and I just mentioned “hey do you dim the lights when the sun goes down?” It turned out all the lights in her house were on, and they were on bright. That simple move, dimming the lights and settling down her house helped her and her toddler get better restful sleep, night after night.

There are a few options that you may have heard of have captivated attention of late. CBD, derived from the hemp plant, known as cannabidiol, has exploded in popularity over the past few years. While the CBD extracted from the cannabis plant in no way gets you high, it's gained a reputation for instilling calm and a sense of relaxation, which has caused a great deal of interest for those suffering from chronic anxiety or sleep disorders. And while there's an enormous amount of anecdotal evidence promising that CBD can do everything under the sun, actual evidence is more scarce. All to say, we're awaiting good quality evidence to help us really understand how CBD affects the brain, and affects sleep. If its something that works for you and helps you get good rest, that's great. If not, and it's something you want to explore, my advice is that you do it in an intentional manner and use safe, regulated products.

## Module 16 Transcript

Supplemental melatonin is a little more intriguing. Melatonin is a hormone, related to serotonin, that is produced in the brain, responds to darkness, and acts as a signal to your brain that it is time to sleep. So, it seems like an obvious slam dunk. However, the data is mixed. About a third of people report positive feedback from taking melatonin supplements under normal circumstances, with higher rates in treating situational events, like jet lag. It's important to know, though, that the effective dose of melatonin is much less than the average person thinks. Seriously, about a half milligram to 1 milligram is enough to get results, so start small if you want to give it a shot. But please beware, I meet so many patients that haven't gotten the memo, melatonin is a very powerful hormone that affects a lot more than your sleep and often I see patients taking five, ten or twenty milligrams. In fact, we once had a young woman come to our clinical practice with a primary concern that she was tired all the time. In fact, she was drinking so much coffee to make up for this fatigue. Do you want to know what the real culprit was? This woman, under so much stress at school had a little trouble sleeping and so she had gone down to the local corner store and asked for something to help. They'd given her a nice bottle of melatonin. Ten milligrams of melatonin. About ten times the dose that I would usually prescribe. It made a lot of sense why this woman was drinking so much coffee. It's because there was so much melatonin in her system that she couldn't wake up.

Many people living with sleep disorders will also turn to recreational substances, either intentionally or unintentionally through built habit, to get to sleep. Even relatively mild amounts of alcoholic drinks can become habit forming, and the results can be quite harmful in the long term. As a sedative, alcohol does, in fact, lull you into sleep, but research shows us that the brain is unable to enter the full extent of the sleep cycles, meaning that the same substance that puts you to sleep is keeping you from the full extent of sleep's organizational and cleansing properties.

We're seeing that the way we sleep is deeply tied to the way we live. And the best treatments are oftentimes rooted in the simple changes we make in our environment,

## Module 16 Transcript

schedule, and habits. All to say that I think your sleep is a neglected piece of your mental health and your mental fitness and I know in my life paying more attention to my sleep, monitoring it, engaging with improving my sleep in an active way, improving the environment in which I sleep – adding a noise machine, an air filter, upgrading my mattress, talking to my partner about the fact that she snores sometimes. These have all been instrumental in improving my sleep quality and feeling that directly as a more robust sense of my own mental health and mental fitness. And it's why I want you to hear my encouragement to start tonight in getting a better night's sleep to improve your mental health.