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Nidra: An Ayurvedic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Sleep is a natural, essential activity for the restoration of fatigued tissues, with its mechanism not fully elucidated. Ayurveda considers sleep, along with diet and celibacy, as fundamental pillars of life. **Materials & Methods:** Various literatures like Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Astanga Hridaya, modern medical textbooks, journals and online databases are reviewed. **Results:** Proper sleep promotes happiness, nourishment, strength, knowledge, and longevity. Day sleep (*Divaswapna*) is recommended under specific conditions, aligning with seasonal rhythms. Insomnia (*Nidranasa*) is linked to *Dosha* imbalances, mental exhaustion, and systemic disturbances. **Discussion:** Ayurvedic recommendations for daytime sleep vary based on individual constitutions and health conditions. The approach underscores the significance of balancing these factors for sound and restorative sleep. **Conclusion:** The Ayurvedic perspective emphasizes obtaining the right amount of sleep at the right time for overall well-being. Sleep is deemed a rejuvenating force, contributing to strength, nourishment, and satisfaction. Individualized regimens are crucial to ensure proper sleep and address potential imbalances, aligning with Ayurvedic principles for holistic health.

Key words: *Nidra, Sleep, Upastambha, Ayurveda.*

INTRODUCTION

Sleep is a natural activity of all living beings. It is the period of rest for fatigued and worn-out tissues. Mechanism of sleep has not been understood correctly so far. It has been observed that it is a normal rhythmical activity of nerve cells of the brain, the third ventricle of the brain and the hypothalamus are chiefly involved in this and normalcy of these is necessary for sleep. Some of the current postulates regarding the cause of sleep are; a certain hormone/enzyme or chemical produced by the brain induces sleep; the non-

contact of dendrites of one nerve cell in the brain with those of its adjacent nerve cell; deficient blood supply to the brain and sleep is a conditioned reflex just like hunger happening on conditions of the environment.

Sleep occurs naturally in healthy persons at nights regularly as habituated. Man can exercise some control over it, he can prepare, postpone or even avoid it for short periods temporarily. But he cannot be without sleep longer than 3 to 4 weeks. Absence or inadequacy of sleep gives rise to many disorders of the mind, sense organs and also many functional systems of the body such as digestive, excretory, reproductive etc. sleep is as essential to the body as food, air and water. Man requires about 6 to 8 hours of sleep every day for maintenance of good health. Slight variations either less or more - for short periods may not cause harm. Periods of natural sleep in infants and children is long (16-18 hours), it decreases in middle age (7-8 hours) and old age (4-5 hours); 6 hours of sleep daily is the minimum requirement for a healthy adult.

According to Ayurveda, *Aahar* (Diet), *Nidra* (Sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy) are the *Upastambhas* of Life. These are the three pillars or support system of life.

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These three factors of life provide strength, complexion and growth up till the full span of life. One of the most important parts of that pillar is *Nidra*.

Nidra is very essential and necessary for healthy life. *Nidra* is very important for our physical as well as mental health. Our body tries to repair and heal itself during *Nidra*. It restores our ability to perform daily tasks. Sound sleep nourishes the body that's why *Nidra* is called as *Bhutadhatri*, because *Nidra* takes care and supports *Prana* of an individual like a *Mata*/mother takes care and supports her child.

Definition

Acharya Charaka has stated *Nidra* as- "It is a special state of mind in which the mind is not associated with any type of *Indriyas*. This detachment from the *Bahiya Vishaya* is the result from the tiredness of the body as well as mind."

According to *Chakrapani Datta*, Sleep is considered as cause as well as *Chikitsa* for *Sthoulya* and *Karshya*^[1]

How *Nidra* is induced?

Mana understood as *Antakarana* i.e., *Atma* along with *Mana*. The mind exhausted after indulging in sensory and motor perceptions. So further mind cannot able to work or receive the knowledge. There will be *Vishaya Nivrutti* (Detachment from the worldly objects) so that person will attain the sleep at this stage.^[2]

When *Mana* is exhausted then sleeps occurs this phenomenon can be understood in this manner. According to Howell, sleep is due to cerebral ischemia. Cerebral cortex is the seat of higher centres like pre and post central gyres, association area etc., which have the correlation with mental activities described in Ayurveda. So due to the reduction in cerebral blood supply *Mana* becomes *Klanta* that causes sleep (*Nidra*). Further during sleep, *Indriyas* (*Jnanendriya* and *Karmendriya*) become inactive by the detachment from their sense organs or from their work.

Sushruta has described that *Nidra* (sleep) is *Vaisnavi* (related to *Visnu*) it is sinful, (makes for committing of sin) and encroaches upon all living beings by nature.^[3]

When *Sangyavaha Srotamsi* (channels carrying sensation) become filled with *Slesma* (*Kapha*) and

dominated by *Tamaguna*, then sleep known as *Tamsi Nidra* manifests, from which persons cannot be awakened; this occurs at the time of death.

Svabhaviki Nidra (Natural Sleep)

Sleep manifests naturally in persons with predominance of *Tamo-Guna* both during day and night; in those with predominance of *Rajoguna* it occurs without any reason at any time; in persons with predominance of *Satwaguna*, it occurs at midnights which is *Svabhaviki Nidra*.

Vaikariki Nidra (Unnatural Sleep)

In persons in whom *Slesma* (*Kapha*) has decreased and *Anila* (*Vata*) has increased, and in those whose mind and body are in trouble by disease etc., it (sleep) does not appear at all, any time; this is *Vaikariki* (abnormal).

Acharya Vagbhata has stated that with the accumulation of *Kapha Dosh*, he contends, the individual falls asleep as the mind becomes bereft of sense organs due to fatigue.^[4]

Types of *Nidra*

Acharya Charaka has classified *Nidra* in following manner according to causes^[5]

- ***Tamobhava*** - caused by *tama*
- ***Shleshmasamudbhava*** - caused by vitiated *Kapha*
- ***Manah-Sharirshramasaambhava*** - caused by mental and mental exertion
- ***Agantuki*** - indicative of bad prognosis leading imminent death
- ***Vyadhyanuvartini*** - caused as a complication of other disease like *Sannipatajajwara* etc.
- ***Ratri-Swabhavaprabhava*** - caused by the very nature of the night

Acharya Dalhana classified that sleep is of three kinds^[6]

- ***Tamsi*** - when *Sangyavahastrotas* become filled with *Shleshma* dominated by *Tamoguna*, *Tamsi Nidra* is produced
- ***Svabhaviki (natural)*** - occurring daily for every person and

- **Vaikariki (abnormal)** - occurring due to troubles of the body and mind.

Acharya Vagbhata has classified in seven types as following manner.^[7]

- **Kalawabhawaj** - it produces at the accustomed time. i.e. nights
- **Amayaja** - it is produced due to effect of diseases
- **By fatigue of Mana** - when *Mana* is exhausted
- **By fatigue of Sharira** - when body is exhausted
- **Shleshmaprabhavaj** - it is produced due to predominance of *Kapha*
- **Agantuka** - this type of *Nidra* is produced by external factors e.g., traumatic etc.
- **Tamobhava** - it is produced by predominance of *Tamoguna*.

Benefits of Sleep

- Proper sleep brings *Sukha* (happiness), *Pushti* (nourishment), *Bala* (strength), *Vrishata* (Potency/fertility), *Jnana* (knowledge) and *Jiva* (longevity) to a person.
- Improper sleep cause *Dukha* (misery), *Karshya* (emaciation), *Abala* (weakness), *Klibata* (sterility), *Ajnana* (ignorance) and *Marana* (death).
- A person who desires long life should be indulge in *Kala Nidra* (Sleep in proper time).^[8]
- The aspects of happiness, nourishment strength, virility, knowledge and long life are attained by sound and timely sleep whereas improper sleep leads to sorrow, emaciation, weakness, impotence, ignorance and even death.
- Sleep is the time for rebuilding, construction. It is an anabolic event and is held to be as best as the divine elixir. If sleep is lost, *Vata* and *Pitta Dosh*a are likely to be vitiated.^[9]

Divaswapna (Day Sleep)

Indications of Divaswapna

- Sleeping during the day time can be prescribed for those who are *Karshita* (exhausted) by singing,

Adhyayana (study), *Madya* (alcoholic drinks), *Stri* (sexual acts), *Karma-Panchakarma*-elimination therapy, *Bhara* (carrying heavy weight), *Adhva* (walking long distance)

- Those suffering from *Ajirna* (indigestion), *Kshata* (injured), *Kshina* (debilitated), *Vridhdha* (old age), *Bala* (children), *Abala* (less strength), suffer from *Trishna* (thirst), *Atisara* (diarrhea), *Shula* (colic pain), *Shwasa* (dyspnoea), *Hikka* (hiccup), *Krishha* (emaciated), *Patita* (injured due to fall), *Abhahata* (injured due to assault), *Unmatta* (insanity), those exhausted by *Yana* (journey) by a vehicle, *Prajagara* (night asleep), afflicted with *Krodha* (anger), *Shoka* (grief), and *Bhaya* (fear) and *Divaswapna Uchita* (those who are accustomed to day sleep).
- *Divaswapna* (day sleep) is not indicated in all *Ritu* except *Grishma Ritu*. In *Grishma Ritu Vata Dosh*a is in accumulative stage (*Chaya*) and *Bala* is less so day sleep is indicated.^[10]

Divaswapna Phala

- Equilibrium of dhatus and strength are maintained and *Kapha* nourishes the organs and ensures longevity.
- *Diva Swapna* is indicated in *Grishmaritu*, as the nights become shorter and *Vata* gets aggravated in the body due to the *Ruksha Guna* of *Adana Kala*. Therefore, *Diva Swapna* in seasons other than *Grishmaritu* is not advisable as it aggravates *Kapha* and *Pitta*.
- *Chakrapani* in Ayurveda *Dipika* says; the person didn't sleep during night time, then half of that time during day time is sufficient to balance the healthy state. Day sleep should be undergone with empty stomach after intake of food day sleep is contraindicated. By that practice even *Swastha* person also get *Rog*i.^[11]

Divaswapna Nishedha: (Contraindications)

- Sleeping during the daytime in the seasons other than summer is not advisable as it causes vitiation of *Kapha* and *Pitta*.

- Persons with *Meda* (excessive fat), *Sneha Nitya* (those who are addicted to taking unctuous substances), *Shelsh mala* (those with *Kapha* constitution), *Shleshma Roga* (those suffering from disease due to the vitiation of *Kapha*) and *Dushi Visha* (those suffering from poisoning will increase the *Visa Vega*) should never sleep during day time.^[12]

Ratri Jagarana (Effect of night awakening)

- Awakening during night causes *Rukshata* (roughness) in the body; sleep during day time causes *Snigdhatata* (unctuousness) and sleeping in sitting posture is not causing *Arukshata* or *Abhishyandi* (neither roughness nor unctuousness).
- Chakrapani Datta* says *Ratri Jagarana* increases the *Ruksha Guna* because of its nature.^[13]
- Sleeping during day is prohibited in all seasons except summer; though prohibited (generally) sleep of one muhurta (28 minutes) during day is not prohibited for children, the aged, those fatigued from woman (copulation), the injured, the emaciated; who drink wine habitually, exhausted by journey in chariots (vehicle), riding on animals, walking long distances, hard physical activities; those who have not partaken food, who are having decrease of fat, sweat, *Kapha*, *Rasa* and *Rakta* and who are having indigestion. For those who had kept awake at night, sleeping during day for half of that period (of wakefulness) is desirable.^[14]
- Day sleep is definitely abnormal; it is unrighteousness (improper) on the part of the sleeper and aggravates all the dosha; from such aggravation, cough dyspnoea, nasal catarrh, feeling of heaviness of head, body aches, anorexia, fever and weakness of digestive fire develop. Even in those who kept awake at nights, the same disease produced by *Vata* and *Pitta* may arise.^[15]
- Hence, persons should not keep awake at night and should avoid sleeping during day; knowing that both these aggravate the *Dosha*, the wise should indulge in sleep moderately, by doing so, the person will be free from disease, will have a pleasant mind, endowed with strength, color/complexion and virility; neither very stout nor very lean, with beautiful appearance and lives for a hundred years.
- Those who are habituated to either day sleep or staying awake at night, such sleep and wakefulness do not cause any harm to them.^[16]
- For person suffering from aggravation of *Kapha*, *Medas* (fat) and *Visa* (poisons) keeping awake at nights is beneficial; sleeping during day is beneficial for those suffering from thirst, pain in the abdomen, hiccup, indigestion and diarrhoea.
- Grishma Ritu* (Summer season) is characterized by the dryness of *Adanakala* (Period of extraction), short duration of night and *Caya* (accumulation) of *Vata* and hence daytime sleep is desirable in this *Ritu* (season).
- It is contra-indicated in other *Ritus* (seasons) as it leads to vitiation of *Kapha* and *Pitta*.
- Day time sleep in all *Ritus* is not contra-indicated for those who are engaged in excessive talking, excessive journey, too much walking, alcoholic consumption, sexual intercourse and bearing weight, people exhausted of anger, grief and fright, those suffering from *Swas* (asthma), *Hidhma* (belching), and *Atisara* (diarrhea), the aged, children, the weak, the exhausted, those suffering from chest injuries, those afflicted with thirst, intense pain, indigestion, trauma, insanity and the ones who are habituated to sleep during day time. In such exempted cases, day time sleep brings about *Dhatu samya* (equilibrium of tissue) and the *Kapha* thus increased nourishes the body.^[17]
- People who are excessively obese, who have excess *Kapha* and those who are habituated to the use of *Sneha Dravyas* (fats) are not permitted to sleep during day time.
- Sleep is totally contraindicated to those who are afflicted with poison and disease of the throat; even at night.

Nidranasa / Loss of sleep/ Insomnia

Elimination of *Dosha* in excess from the body through purgation and emesis, *Nasya*, *Bhaya* (fear), *Chinta* (anxiety), *Krodha* (anger), *Dhuma* (smoking), *Vyayama* (excessive physical exercise), *Rakta Mokshana* (excess blood-letting/blood loss), *Upavasa* (fasting), *Asukha Shayya* (uncomfortable bed), *Satvaudarya / Satva Guna Bhuyishta* (predominance of *Satva Guna*) and *Tamajaya / Tamogunajaya* (suppression or overcome from *Tamo Guna*) are causes for insomnia.

The above-mentioned factors along with *Karya / Karyasakta* (interested to work or naturally committed to work), *Kala* (old age), *Vikara* (due to painful disease), especially due to vitiation of *Vata* obstruct the sleep and induce sleeplessness.^[18]

According to Acharya Sushruta

Loss of sleep is caused by aggravation of *Anila (Vata)* and *Pitta*, exhaustion of the mind, loss of tissues and injury to the body; it gets cured by indulgence in opposites.

For loss of sleep, anointing the body. Oiling the head, massaging and trampling over the body are beneficial. Use of rice, wheat, flour of grains, eatables prepared from sugarcane juice are ideal food; such food being sweet in taste, unctuous, used along with milk and soup of meat etc; soup of meat of animals which lives in burrows, and of *Viskira* birds; *Draksa*, sugar and products of sugarcane juice should be used at nights; cot, seats and vehicles should be pleasant and soft; any other thing which bestows sleep may be adopted by the intelligent person.^[19]

Acharya Vagbhata has mentioned *Atiyoga of Vamana* (emesis), *Anjana* (collyriums) and *Nasya* (errhines/nasal drops); excessive *Langhana* (fasting/attenuation), excessive thinking, coitus, grief, fear and anger are the cause of *Nidranash*.

Loss of sleep results in body ache, heaviness of the body, drowsiness, yawning, inertia, fatigue, giddiness, indigestion, laziness and other diseases due to vitiation of *Vata*.^[20]

Pathya-Apathya***Pathya***

It is the wholesome regimen which does not impair the body system and which is pleasant to the mind. If one follows certain principles and controls the activities and makes changes in the regimen, as mentioned earlier in the form of *Ahara* and *Vihara* management, he can get a sound, normal and good sleep.

Apathya

Those which adversely affect the body and mind are considered to be unwholesome (*Apathya*). It may be said that etiological factors of *Nidranasha* are *Apathya* in the disease, because they increase the disease.

CONCLUSION

We must get the right amount of sleep at the right time in order to maintain our physical and emotional health and treat illnesses. Both the quantity and quality of sleep are crucial. When our body and mind are both at ease, we are in a *Nidra* state. *Nidra* is necessary for good health, long life, wellness, strength, virility, and wisdom. Numerous illnesses are manifested by *Aplanidra* or *Nidranasha*. *Nidranash* is caused by the stresses of *Vata Dosha*, *Pitta Vruddi* and *Kapha Kshaya*. *Nidranash* is the *Updrava* of some disease. *Nidra* is regarded as one of the *Trayoupastambhas*, which serve as the body's pillars of support. Sleep rejuvenates the body, it is *Vrushya*, it gives *Bala*, *Pusti* and *Tusti* [*Bala* means strength, *Pusti* means nourishment of the body and *Tusti* means satisfaction of the mind]. We must get the right amount of sleep at the right time to preserve our health and treat illnesses. The Ayurvedic *Samhitas* provide a great deal of emphasis on the importance and usefulness of sleep, as well as its vital role in maintaining health.

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