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Sleep Your Way to Pain Relief

Adapted from Mark Shepherd, PT, DPT, Fellowship Director at Bellin College for Orthopedic Manual PT

Key Ideas

1. Good sleep is crucial for a healthy brain and for improving pain
2. Women with chronic pelvic pain often experience poor sleep
3. Aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night if you're less than 65 years old; 7 to 8 hours if 65 or older.

How Regular Sleep Cleans the Brain

Getting a solid night's rest may be the answer to a squeaky clean brain! Researchers believe that when we are sleeping, the 'glymphatic system', a network of blood vessels, sweeps through the brain and washes out waste products that have gathered during the day. Some of these waste products include proteins like beta-amyloid and tau -- both of which are associated with certain types of dementia.

How a Clean Brain Improves Pain

While scientists are still investigating how a well-rested brain and pain improvement are connected, we do know that poor sleep can be a strong predictor of pain!

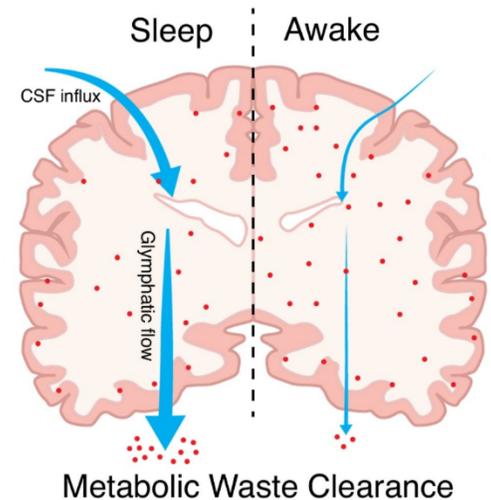
The connection may involve a system called the 'hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis'. This axis regulates the stress response on the organs and may be dysregulated or disturbed by poor sleep. When its dysregulated – either underactive or overactive – this axis can amplify the pain experience.

To summarize this a different way, poor sleep creates a stress response from the brain. That stress can make pain, which is both a physical and emotional experience, much worse. It's time we prioritize our bedtime!

So – What Makes for Restful Sleep?

Here are evidence-based recommendations for a great night of sleep:

1. Go to sleep and wake up at the same times, every day
2. Use the bedroom for only sleep and sexual activity
3. Avoid napping, as this disturbs your night sleep cycle
4. Relax 1-2 hours before it's bedtime!
 - Read a book, take a bath
 - Try not to use electronic devices, as the light can disturb the sleep process
5. Close the blinds, turn the temperature down, and get comfy!



When the body is asleep, more metabolic waste products are cleared from the brain than when the body is awake.
- Natalie Hauglund et al. "[Cleaning the sleeping brain](#)"