

HOW TO GET TO SLEEP

NATURE, NOT DRUGS, AS A CURE FOR INSOMNIA

By DR. JOHN W. SHOEMAKER

THIS might be called the Age of Sleeplessness. Undeniably insomnia, one of the most distressing afflictions that assail humanity, is far more common to-day than ever before in the history of the world. People think harder and study more than ever before; they pursue both pleasure and business with more intense eagerness; their nerves are overstrained, and their brains driven as by whips; and last, but not least, the race has developed an appetite for drugs, which grows by what it feeds on, and which, while acquired largely in the seeking of sleep, has, when indulged beyond a certain point, the effect of banishing healthful slumber for ever from the pillow. Most of the ills that make mankind miserable are afflictions of the ignorant and, chiefly, of the poor. Sleeplessness, however, is the curse of the intellectual man, and a haunter of the bed-sides of the rich and the otherwise fortunate.

But it has come at last to be realised that the drug-cure for insomnia is worse than a failure, and people are beginning to look to Nature for a remedy—not, I may happily add, in vain. Of this new idea it is that I would speak: of Nature as a sleep-bringer, and of how her means may be used instead of chloral, opium, alcohol, and other poisons, which all over this broad land have filled asylums and sanitariums with their victims.

Why do we hear so much about Lakewood, New Jersey, as a resort for rich people? Because (for one reason at least) it is a place of sleep. It is in a region of pines, the emanations of which are sedative and somniferous. Thus it is that millionaire folks have built among the trees palaces which are designed as homes for the sleepless. Worn out by social dissipation, or by the nervous strain inseparable from the business of rapid money-getting, they go to Lakewood to seek among its piney woods that soft repose which elsewhere is denied them.

Certain volatile oils and ethers contained in pine-needles are accountable for the perfume which is so agreeable to our nostrils. Their sedative effect, when one breathes air charged with such emanations, is marked and unmistakable—so that in hospitals nowadays pillows of pine-needle are commonly used to put patients to sleep. It is on the same principle that, in the hop-growing regions of this country, pillows are filled with hops, often mixed with salt or with bran. They contain an alkaloid, called "lupuline," which is strongly soporific.

On one occasion, not very long ago, I was called upon to prescribe for what was supposed to be a hopeless case of insomnia. It was that of a man in public life. He expected me to try some new drug upon him, but I said to him:

"Senator, it is within my knowledge that you own a piece of rural real estate on which there are thick pine woods. I want you to go there, with an axe and a sawhorse, and spend as much of your time as possible cutting down pine trees and sawing them for firewood."

He followed these instructions literally, and within less than a fortnight he was entirely cured. He told me that he slept "like a dead man."

Brain-workers are particularly liable to sleeplessness. Their occupation brings overstrain of the nervous system, and, when they go to bed, they toss upon restless pillows. This drives them to a



physician, who suggests a little whisky before retiring—the result being, in many instances, that the victims become slaves to alcohol.

The best thing in such a case is to keep away from whisky and other drugs and take an ocean voyage. If that be impracticable, the next best expedient to adopt is a visit to the seashore. Sea air is a wonderful nerve-tonic, its sedative and soothing effect being so marked that invalids, wheeled along the beach boardwalks, often fall asleep.

It is probably ozone that does the good work. In crowded cities there is little or no ozone, which may be called a concentrated form of oxygen, but at the seashore there is much of it in the atmosphere, and still more in mid-ocean, far away from the land. Not a very great deal is known about this colourless gas (though it has been reduced in the laboratory to a liquid), but of its healthfulness and quieting influence upon the nerves there is no question.

Exercise of all kinds is admirable as a cure of sleeplessness. People nowadays do not take enough exercise. Mechanical locomotion has made walking to a great extent unnecessary, and machinery has done away with most physical labour. Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, kept 12 women busy grinding grain day and night to supply with food a household of not more than 30 people. To-day, with the help of modern contrivances, the same amount of work will produce flour for five thousand persons. Incidentally to active exercise, the

system imbibes oxygen, the circulation of the blood is stimulated, and moderate fatigue supervenes—all of which conduce to sleepiness. But of all forms of exercise the best for this purpose is horse-back-riding. Pursued for two or three hours daily, it promotes all the functions of the body and quiets the nerves. For sleeplessness there is no better remedy, and for weak children and weak women it is particularly to be recommended.

Distractions of the mind are excellent remedies for insomnia. It is often a good idea to send a nervous patient to the play, the opera or the minstrels. His attention is called away from himself and his troubles; he comes home and goes peacefully to sleep. Nor is the effect of music to be despised. It has a tendency to soothe irritable brain-cells, and in many instances I have known it to produce most happy results.

One need hardly say that this question of sleep is one of the highest possible importance. We give one-third of our lifetime, precious as it is to us, to sleep. Without a fair allowance of sleep we cannot be well, and if deprived of it altogether we should soon die. A case is on record where a person got no sleep for nine days, dying at the end of that period. In China, long ago, deprivation of sleep was used as a form of torture, and even of capital punishment. I have known people who were actually afraid to go to bed for fear of the dread spectre of insomnia which was sure to haunt them through long hours of the

night. How to banish the unwelcome visitor is the question.

I have suggested one or two expedients, but there are others. For example, if you are a victim, try the effect of a bowl of hot—not merely warm, but hot—clam-broth, or oyster-broth, or chicken-broth. It will draw the blood from the brain, quiet the nervous system and bring sleep.

What is it that happens when one goes to sleep? A complete answer cannot be given to this question, but it is known that the blood flows out of the brain, that the eyeballs are turned upward, that the pupils of the eyes become contracted, that the pulse slackens, and that the breathing becomes slower, the amount of air taken into the lungs being only about one-seventh of what it is when one is awake. Apparently, the immediate cause of waking is a flow of blood to the brain.

Obviously, then, when a person is troubled with sleeplessness, any expedient by which the blood may be drawn away from the brain is likely to be good. For, ordinarily, whatever may be the cause of the mischief, too much blood in the brain is directly accountable for the wakefulness. A hot foot-bath will often accomplish the purpose in question; or a warm glass of milk, or a cup of hot water, may so act upon the nutrition and circulation as to relieve the brain of congestion. This, indeed, will often put a restless child to sleep, or a grown person, for that matter.

The use of water outside and inside of the body is neglected. There is a great deal in the old-fashioned water-cure, though charlatans once brought it into disrepute. The next time you suffer from insomnia take a hot bath, and swallow a bowl of water as hot as you can drink it. The two together will make your skin act, stimulate your circulation, lull and quiet your nerves, and draw the blood from your brain. Hardly will you lie down before you will find yourself falling asleep.

The Spanish women rub the backs of their children to put them to sleep. It is a good idea. Often, in cases of insomnia, a vigorous rubbing of the spine, the abdomen, and the head, will cause the patient to fall into slumber. I have myself noticed, while undergoing the attentions of a barber, that the friction of his hands on my head and the back of my neck had a tendency to make me feel drowsy.

When the baby cries and whines in the night, instead of giving it medicine (upsetting its digestion), rub its back, or put it into a warm bath. The bath will take all the congestion from its brain and spinal cord, and the little one will go to sleep the moment it comes out. How much better are such simple expedients than a resort to drugs! And what is good for a child is good for a grown person. A hot water bottle at the feet may prove serviceable in some instances; but remember always to lie with the head high, and to admit plenty of fresh air to the bedroom.

Mental work after dinner should be avoided. It causes a flow of blood to the brain, interferes with digestion, and has a consequent tendency to bring sleeplessness. Strong emotions—anxiety, joy, sorrow, or what-not—have a like effect. Actors and stockbrokers, whose lives contain too much excitement, are particularly liable to insomnia. To the busy financier, that type of the modern human engine run at high pressure, the getting of a proper allowance of sleep is the most serious of problems. His nerve-centres are exhausted, and, when