

## The Importance of Sleep.

### SIMPLE METHODS OF PROMOTING IT.

Never perhaps has the value and necessity of sleep been more generally and fully recognised than in these days when so many people suffer from deprivation of what is in truth "tired Nature's sweet restorer." Without it body and brain gradually become more worn and enfeebled, more prostrate and wretched, until at last one or both collapse altogether because it is only during sleep when voluntary activities cease, that the flowing blood can perfectly perform its task, washing away the waste products of life and work and recuperating all parts of the body. The appositeness of Shakespeare's words, "Sore labour's bath," as applied to sleep, is very evident when we remember this, and his further description of it as "Great Nature's second course, chief nourisher in life's feast" is a reminder that assimilation of the new supplies of nourishment also goes on best during sleep, when the organs are more or less quiescent and renewal and building up of the wasted tissues can proceed unhampered. In the case of children also it is during sleep that growth proceeds, hence the necessity of ensuring sufficient for them, and this under the best and most natural conditions, or they will remain short and stunted.

Sleep, in fact, with the perfect mental and physical relaxation which it should bring, is as essential to life and health as are food and drink, and rest alone, though valuable in itself, is insufficient.

No exact law can be laid down as to the amount of sleep necessary for perfect recuperation, as this depends largely on temperament and occupation. "Those who think most," said a famous physician, "who do most brain-work, need most sleep, because the energies of the brain have then to be recuperated," and, he added, "time 'saved' from necessary sleep is infallibly destructive to mind, body, and estate."

On an average from six to eight hours out of each twenty-four will be found necessary in order to keep the brain and body of adults healthily active, much more, of course, being requisite for children, but Nature is in all cases the best guide, and soon gives warning of the effects of starvation in this matter, headache, heavy, wretched, feeling on rising in the morning, and other unmistakable symptoms telling of incomplete recuperation, and if the warning is disregarded, insomnia, that curse of modern life, and bringer of worse ills, will be the penalty—not one to be lightly resisted, as

many cases of nervous and mental breakdown prove.

Those suffering from any tendency to sleeplessness should most emphatically take every possible means of arresting it at first, or later it will be difficult to deal with. Among the details that should be considered as tending to promote healthful sleep are these: a cool, well-ventilated room, the window darkened in summer, especially if the light tends to wakefulness; a moderately firm bed, "springy" if you will, but not of the downy variety, which is enervating and heating, tending to weak, flabby muscles and preventing free respiration through the pores of the skin, not in any way conducive to healthful restorative sleep; a low pillow, not so thick and soft as to envelop the head and face, keeping the skin hot and wrinkled, nor so high as to strain the neck muscles, forbidding them to rest, and causing the headache with which many people wake in the morning; light covering, sufficient to maintain warmth, but not enough to cause over-heating of the body, and, of course, it need hardly be said that none of the garments worn during the day must be retained for night wear, as, being already impregnated with perspiration and gaseous matters given off by the body, these require airing and cannot promote the skin-respiration that is one of the essentials of recuperative sleep. Habit also is important, and those especially who have any tendency to sleeplessness will be wise to keep to a regular hour of retirement, remembering that sleep taken before midnight when the circulation is strong is more restorative than that in the early morning hours, when vitality falls and the blood flows more feebly."

When sleep refuses to come readily, in spite of hygienic inducements, other simple matters may be considered and modified or tried. Over-activity of the mind and brain at the time of retiring is a frequent cause, due to study, exciting reading, lively conversation, or other stimulating occupation, preceding the effort to sleep, and in this case a short walk after a light supper may be tried (supplementing regular daily exercise), or a warm footbath or a hot water bottle in bed, either tending to promote a flow of blood to the lower extremities, and to lessen the flow to the brain (which has been previously increased owing to activity of that organ), pre-disposing it to rest. The same treatment is useful in sleeplessness arising from cold feet, which are a very common cause. Brushing the body over with a flesh brush, rubbing with a rough towel, or taking a warm bath will also be found helpful as promoting the general circulation, and thus preventing an

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