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- 2008 Young Psychiatrist Award of the Indian Psychiatric Association
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'Lack of melatonin is a cause of cancer'

Do you have the following experience--fall asleep at night while you are watching TV, but feel tired as if you do not get enough sleep in the morning? Dr. Ravi Gupta, a member of the World Academy of Sleep Medicine as well as a renowned sleep medicine doctor in India, points out that human eyes are especially sensitive to blue light released in a large quantity by televisions, computer screens and mobile phones. Even in an environment that is not brightly lit, blue light tricks the brain into thinking that it is actually daytime, thereby inhibiting the secretion of melatonin, disrupting a normal sleep pattern and worsening insomnia.

The brain usually starts secreting melatonin at 9 or 10pm. Melatonin can help induce sleep and inhibit cell activities, and a lack of it thereof is deemed to be the cause of cancer in night shift workers and people who sleep with the lights on.

Having restless nights is not due to bad health; but rather, lack of sleep may curtail life expectancy.

We all know that sleep is vitally important. In fact, the importance of sleep far exceeds what we perceive. There is a lot of evidence to show that, compared to exercise, nutrition, smoking, high blood pressure or high blood lipids, sleep quality exerts a far greater impact on life expectancy. Sleep deprivation, defined as 2 hours' shorter sleeping time, irregular sleeping hours or restlessness, besides damaging health, can cause dire consequences and man-made deficiencies.



The modern man, under tremendous work pressure and active in all sorts of social interactions, feels that sleeping is a waste of time or even a dispensable need. They opine that they can do a lot more things at the expense of sleep. However, can we really sacrifice our sleep? What price do we have to pay?

Dr. Ravi Gupta quotes the US Challenger Space Shuttle crash in 1986. 73 seconds after its take-off from Florida, the space shuttle exploded in front of countless TV viewers around the world, killing the entire crew. The commission of inquiry reported that the main cause of the accident was because the senior managers of NASA had been working under tremendous pressure and continuous overtime. Due to exhaustion and lack of sleep, they did not make the correct decisions, which led to the tragedy. It can be seen that quality and adequate sleep is the basic condition for the human body to maintain normal activities for one day, and a vitally important part in proper health maintenance.

