

HEALTH EVENTS

Parent and family health event

Enjoy yoga, dance classes and more. Starts at 6 p.m. Thursday at Shadd Elementary School, 5601 East Capitol St. SE, Washington. Child care is provided. Event is at 6 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. For more information, visit dc.gov.

Run/Walk for Lyme Disease

The first annual 5K Run/Walk for Lyme Disease starts at 8:30 a.m. Saturday at South Run Park, Springfield. 1K Fun Run begins at 8:45 a.m. Register at natcaplyme.org or race day from 7 to 8:15 a.m. Prizes, refreshments and Lyme disease information are available.

Arthritis Walk

Rain or shine, the Arthritis Walk check-in begins at 9 a.m. and walk starts at 10 a.m. May 30 at the Sylvan Theater, 15th Street and Independence Avenue SW. Choose from 3-miler or 1-mile walk route. There is no registration fee; however, participants are urged to raise money. Prizes available for anyone who raise \$250 or more. Visit letsmovevetogetherdc.kintera.org for more information.

Growing evidence suggests that sleeping woes cause illnesses

By Mark Roth

Dr. Anne Germain is biased toward sleep. As a sleep researcher at the University of Pittsburgh, she naturally focuses on the somnambulant side of the daily cycle.

But she also believes there is growing evidence that sleep problems are actually the cause of many psychological and physical illnesses, rather than a side effect of them.

"I think it's a valid theory that sleep disorders lead to psychological disorders," said Germain, who is based at Western Psychiatric Institute & Clinic.

While it's true that depression and stress can affect sleep, she said, "We've paid much less attention to the other possibility, and the more we look into it, the more consistently we find that there is a very strong relationship of sleep problems being associated with all sorts of psychological and physical health



COURTESY PHOTO

A GOOD NIGHT'S REST: Researchers say there is a strong relationship of sleep problems being associated with all sorts of psychological and physical health problems.

problems.

"I have actually contended that sleep disorders are the starting point for depression, anxiety, even substance abuse, because oftentimes when people start drinking heavily, it has to do with trying to get to sleep."

Her views have been influenced by the research she is doing on returning military veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who have post-traumatic stress disorder and recurrent nightmares.

In the first weeks after a traumatic event — the death of a friend or a close encounter with a roadside bomb — veterans' nightmares often replay the event, she said. As time goes on, the content of the dream will change, but its emotional hallmarks will remain the same.

If the cycle of those dreams isn't broken, the nightmares can become chronic and ingrained, spilling over into daytime life in the form of faltering concentration, volatile temper and poor memory.

But when doctors are able to stop the nightmares and make sleep more normal, she said, many of the other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disappear.

"Whether we're dealing with depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder, when we target sleep problems, we can have a significant improvement in people's daytime functioning," she said.

In the sleep lab at Western Psych, Germain is now doing brain-imaging studies on returning veterans to see how their mental activity differs from that in normal sleepers.

Those results aren't in yet, but in

the meantime, she said, there are two effective therapies available to reduce or eliminate nightmares.

One is an older high-blood-pressure medication called prazosin. It didn't do a very good job of controlling blood pressure, she said, but it turned out to be very effective at combating nightmares because it decreases the output of adrenaline.

The other treatment doesn't involve any medication.

Known as imagery-rehearsal therapy, it provides ways for people to rewrite their nightmares into less threatening dreams, and it is effective in more than 90 percent of people who have tried it.

The technique "is as simple as rehearsing new dreams," she said. "We'll tell people to pick a nightmare they can work with, something manageable, and I'll ask them to write it down, and then to flip the page over and write a new dream, and that will be repeated and rehearsed for three times a day, so you train your brain to have a new set of images."

People don't necessarily remember their new dreams after the rescripting, she said, but they will stop having the nightmares.

And sometimes, even if their dreams don't exactly follow the new plot line, they will start out like the old nightmare but then change into something benign.

"So someone who dreams about an intruder will say, 'Yeah, I did dream about this guy knocking on my door and bursting into the apartment, but I'm not sure what happened next and then it morphed into making cookies with my grandmother,'" she said.

— *Scripps Howard*

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WISDOM TEETH

Every month I see dozens of patients regarding their wisdom teeth. They want to know what their wisdom teeth are, whether they have to be removed, and what the wisdom tooth extraction process is like? Many of these patients are already experiencing an irritating pain caused by the eruption or infection of what dental professionals call the four thirds. Others were referred by their general dentists before the third molars become a problem. Either way, my job as an Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon is to evaluate these teeth and, in most cases, remove them.

By the age of 18, the average adult has 32 teeth: 16 on the top and 16 on the bottom. Each tooth in the mouth has a specific name and function. The teeth in the front of the mouth (incisors, canines and bicuspid teeth) are ideal for grasping and biting food into smaller pieces. The back teeth (molar teeth) are used to grind up food into a consistency suitable for swallowing. Despite the number of teeth each person eventually develops, the average mouth is made to hold only 28 teeth. Wisdom teeth are the last to erupt within the mouth. When they align properly and the gum tissue is healthy, wisdom teeth do not need to be removed. Unfortunately, this does not generally happen. The extraction of wisdom teeth is necessary when they are prevented from properly erupting in the mouth. They may grow sideways, partially emerge from the gum, and even remain trapped beneath the gum and bone (impacted teeth). Impacted teeth can take many positions in the bone as they attempt to find a pathway that will allow them to successfully erupt.

These poorly positioned impacted teeth can cause many problems. When they are partially erupted, the opening around the teeth allows bacteria to grow and will eventually cause an infection. The result: swelling, stiffness, pain and illness. The pressure from the erupting wisdom teeth may move other teeth and disrupt the orthodontic or natural alignment of the teeth. The most serious problem occurs when tumors or cysts form around the impacted wisdom teeth, resulting in the destruction of the jawbone and healthy teeth. Removal of the offending impacted teeth usually resolves these problems. Studies show that early evaluation and treatment result in a superior outcome for the patient. If you have more questions about the removal of wisdom teeth or would like an evaluation of your third molars please contact my office today at (202)296-6600.



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