



Circadian Sleep Disorders Fact Sheet

Definitions

- **Circadian Sleep Disorders (CSDs)** are neurological disorders in which the sleep-wake cycle is out of sync with the day-night cycle. They include:
- **Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS)**, characterized by an inability to fall asleep until very late at night, with the resulting need to sleep late in the morning or into the afternoon (a delayed body clock).
- **Non-24-Hour Sleep-Wake Disorder (Non-24)**, a condition in which a person's day length is significantly longer than 24 hours, so that sleep times get later each day, cycling around the clock in a matter of days or weeks.

Symptoms

- Difficulty falling asleep at the desired time
- Chronic tiredness, especially when trying to follow a daytime schedule
- Sleep deprivation symptoms which can mimic depression, ADHD, fibromyalgia, and other disorders

Causes

- **Circadian Sleep Disorders** are neurological disorders, not mental illnesses.
- Hormones in the body are not secreted on a normal day-night schedule.
- These disorders are not simply due to a lack of self-discipline. Patients are really unable to fall asleep and awaken on a normal schedule.

Diagnosis

- A sleep specialist will look at a sleep log, possibly supported by actigraph monitoring.
- He may prescribe an overnight sleep study to rule out other causes.
- Many doctors are not aware of these disorders, or not trained to recognize them.

Treatment

- **Circadian Sleep Disorders** are chronic, lifelong conditions. There is no cure.
- They are often treated by using bright light in the morning, avoiding bright light in the evening, and taking melatonin supplements. The timing of both light and melatonin is critical – consult a sleep specialist.
- Sleeping pills are rarely effective when used in conflict with the body's natural cycle as they do not correct the underlying circadian abnormality.
- Treatment does not work for everyone.

Living with DSPS or Non-24

- Both conditions often severely disrupt essential activities such as work, school and parenting.
- Attempting to live on a normal daytime schedule in the absence of successful treatment results in severe sleep deprivation which often seriously impacts health.