



## e) The physiology of sleep

What could be more natural than sleeping? Nothing. All living beings, from animals to vegetables, take time to rest. Sleep is a stimulus that cannot be resisted and is almost always regulated by our own individual biological clocks. So what exactly is sleep? That is not an easy question to answer since it still remains something of a mystery to the world's most eminent researchers. Sleep has always been both a source of fascination and a worry for mankind. While it is true that sleep coincides with dreams, and that dreaming is a good indication of healthy sleep, for many people bedtime causes great anxiety. This is true for children, who fear being separated from reality, but it is also true for adults who are often unable to achieve that state where most nervous reflexes subside and muscle tone diminishes, and the whole body can rest. In western civilisation sleeplessness is a social problem. It is estimated that in the United States alone, 50% of the population experience insufficient or dissatisfying sleep patterns.

A vast number of Italians also get little or no sleep, and are subject to problems such as slow reflexes, a significant drop in physical and psychological performance, memory loss, irritability and premature aging. Studies carried out by a team of young researchers at the Institute of Endocrinology at the University of Chicago show that after just a week of insufficient sleep, a number of hormone levels are altered to such an alarming degree that, if not kept under control, they can cause diabetes, high blood pressure, memory loss and obesity.

### So what causes poor sleep?

There are many and varied reasons for this. Some are psychological (family problems, work, stress, anxiety etc.); some are physical and environmental (temperature, noise, etc.). One of the external causes of poor sleep is poor mattress quality. And this brings us to think seriously about the strong effect of this item of furniture on our quality of life.

First of all, no single model can be right for everyone. A mattress must be chosen for the individual needs of whoever is going to use it. In other words, the person's weight, height, how much they perspire, the climate and the bed base (???) are all fundamental elements to be considered when choosing a mattress. And there are absolutely no grounds for believing that old wool mattresses are better than those made with today's modern materials. In fact, wool mattresses soon become deformed, the wool gets knotted and no longer provides proper support for the body. Not to mention the high maintenance required by these mattresses... There is also a tendency today for consumers to opt for futons, oriental mattresses, usually made of cotton, which are quite slim, flexible and can easily be rolled up. However, even though these mattresses are fashionable at the moment, they do not ensure healthy sleep. Their structure does not provide adequate support to the spine. Back pain and other ailments, are often the bedmates of these choices... Choosing a good mattress is of vital importance today. And the best way to make this choice is to trust the experts in the field, who can match the best product to particular needs, choosing between, say, springs, latex, and the latest polyurethane foams.

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