

Sleep Deprivation May Help Treat PTSD

People kept awake at night after seeing disturbing images did not develop fear-based memories, study finds

FRIDAY, Dec. 10 (HealthDay News) -- Sleep deprivation may be therapeutic for some people with post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders, a new study suggests.

Previous research has shown that sleep plays a crucial role in the consolidation of memories, and that the development of fear-related memories is an important part of anxiety disorders such as PTSD.

In this study, researchers investigated what happened when they deprived people of sleep after they had seen disturbing images. Healthy volunteers were shown video clips of both safe driving and traffic crashes. Half of the participants were then deprived of sleep while the others got a normal night's sleep.

Follow-up assessments showed that sleep deprivation eliminated the fear-associated memories.

The study appears in the journal *Biological Psychiatry*.

"Sleep deprivation after exposure to a traumatic event, whether intentional or not, may help prevent PTSD. Our findings may help to clarify the functional role of acute insomnia and to develop a prophylactic strategy of sleep restriction for prevention of PTSD," corresponding author Dr. Kenichi Kuriyama said in a journal news release.

"It would be nice if the benefits of sleep deprivation upon fear learning could be produced more easily for survivors of extreme stress," journal editor Dr. John Krystal, professor and chair of psychiatry at Yale University, said in the news release.

"New insights into the neurobiology of sleep-dependent learning may make it possible for these people to take a medication that disrupts this process while leaving restorative elements of sleep intact," he added.

More information

The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more about [PTSD](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: *Biological Psychiatry*, news release, Dec. 7, 2010

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