An Integrative Health Approach to Narcolepsy

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What is an integrative approach?

1. Integrates conventional medicine and CAM, body and mind, science and spirituality.

2. Focused on prevention, reducing chronic inflammation.

3. Offers regard for personal, subjective experience of the individual.

4. Emphasizes the distinction between “disease” and “illness.”
What is chronic inflammation?

- Friendly fire: immune system gone awry
- We literally run hot
- Underlies most major illness
- Present in narcolepsy
- Narcolepsy is autoimmune / inflammatory
- Commonly rooted in lifestyle
- How can we become really cool?
Global warming as planetary chronic inflammation
Eight IH suggestions for narcolepsy

1. Eat well
2. Move it
3. Learn to rest
4. Sleep well
5. Dream well
6. Mind your meds
7. Love your body
8. Feed your head
1. Eat well

The Standard American Diet (SAD) is hot

**AVOID**

- Processed, manufactured foods
- High glycemic foods
- Bad fats: transfats, saturated fats?
- Excessive caffeine, stimulants
- Things hard to pronounce
- Skipping meals to lose weight
- Food you are sensitive to
1. Eat well

- Cool the heat of chronic inflammation with a Mediterranean diet.
- Consider a high quality multivitamin - mineral supplement
- Supplement with high quality omega 3 fatty acids (fish oil)
The narcolepsy-gluten hypothesis

1. Gluten sensitivity is linked to:
   - an autoimmune attack on hypocretin cells, and/or
   - antibodies inflict neurological damage causing narcolepsy*
   - gut, metabolic disturbances causing excessive sleepiness, fatigue

2. What causes gluten sensitivity?
   - hybridization, alteration of wheat over centuries
   - microbiome (bacteria) damage via antibiotics, C-sections, diet
   - there is little gluten sensitivity in Asia

3. Recommendations:
   - discuss with your doctor / nutritionist
   - experiment with a gluten free diet

*Heidi Lindborg - Zombie Institute
2. Move it

- Develop an energizing morning ritual using light and movement
- Engage in a practical, personal daily exercise program, eg, walking or swimming, etc.
- Consider the power of techniques like yoga, Nia, Tai Chi, Chi Gong

"The evidence base for the powerful role of physical activity in promoting and maintaining health, preventing disease and speeding healing is nothing short of massive." — Andrew Weil, MD
3. Learn to rest

The human energy crisis

- unconscious identification with machines
- we see sleepiness as need for fuel, not rest
- we seek fuel in “counterfeit energies”
- we are overly dependent on stimulants
- we confuse rest with stimulating recreation
- we confuse rest with inebriation
- we are literally rest-less

Nothing is so intolerable to man as being fully at rest.

-- Blaise Pascal
3. Learn to rest

Why is it so hard for us to rest?
When we rest, we experience the opportunistic emergence of our shadow issues.

What is genuine rest?
Rest is “waking sleep”—an essential bridge to sleeping and dreaming.

*Life is lived in the pauses, not the events.*  -- Hugh Prather
A note on EDS and cataplexy

I am part of the load
Not rightly balanced
I drop off in the grass,
like the old Cave-sleepers,
to browse wherever I fall.
— Rumi

Dying in the pine barrens

“Practice dying” — Plato
Learn to rest

Rest practices

- Mindfulness meditation
- Muscular relaxation
- Heart math
- Breathing: 4-7-8 breath
- Self-hypnosis, imagery
- Gentle yoga
- Lightheartening / laughter
We don't get sleep because we...don’t ‘get’ sleep!

- defined negatively: not waking, non-REM
- valued in terms of waking world functions
- pre-copernican-like, wake-centric mindset
- we are addicted to waking consciousness
- seen as servant of waking life
4. Sleep well

- Sleep is cool
- Sleep is in short supply
- Sleep tips don’t work
- Sleep transformation does
- CBT-I for insomnia
4. Sleep well

Light at night is hot

- We deify light, demonize darkness
- Underexposed to light by day
- Overexposed to light at night (LAN)
- LAN damages circadian rhythms
- Suppresses melatonin
- WHO: shift work a probable carcinogen
- Use blue blocker technology
- Morning light is really cool
1. The dream is ESP & OBE — frees consciousness from body

2. REM sleep is cool: consolidates memory, regulates mood, and ‘digests’ life.

3. Dreaming is a way of seeing with dream (shamanic or artist) eyes.

4. What are nightmares? Castaneda’s view…

5. Narcolepsy as reluctant shamanism
6. Mind your meds

Be mindful of medications
- are they essential?
- what are their side effects?
- psych meds can be addictive
- many are symptom suppressive
- many disrupt rhythms & sleep
- many suppress dreaming
- how might they interact?
- are there alternatives?
- re-evaluate over time!
6. Mind your meds

- Consider proven CAM (complimentary & alternative medicine) approaches vs. symptom suppression

- Consider using natural sleep and stimulant alternatives including botanicals and nutraceuticals.

- TCM/acupuncture, homeopathy, Ayurvedic medicine, naturopathic medicine; energy medicine

Consider CAM for narcolepsy
7. Love your body

Medicalization: healthcare as war with the body

- We “fight disease, battle symptoms, kill germs”

- Medicalization confuses signs of healing with illness

- Caution re medical hexing

- A non-violent approach: trust in endogenous (spontaneous) healing

- Self-efficacy: do I believe in my innate capacity to heal?
7. Love your body
7. Love your body
Most of us have a more balanced sense of how to identify with a dog than with our body. We love our dog today, but we can’t love our body because we are waiting for it to be different. Free of the anger that comes from unreasonable expectations, we feed our dog a good, simple diet. We exercise him and bathe him and take him to get his shots. We keep him away from dangerous situations and gently decline to give him everything he wants. There is no war in this relationship because there is neither neglect nor a battle for perfection. A sane approach to questions about diet, exercise, sleep, and the like is to ask, “If my body were my beloved pet, what would I do?”

— Hugh Prather
8. Feed your head (creative narcolepsy)

> A non-medicalized view of narcolepsy: healthy way to be sick
- Heightened permeability between waking & sleep/dreams
- A kind of reluctant shamanism? A special source of creativity?

> Focus on where you want to go (life as a bike ride)
  (Positive vs non-negative thinking)
- Cultivate mindful or non-judgmental awareness
- Cultivate radical passion — a principle or value driven life
- Get “high” — live for something greater than yourself

> Consider:
- Practicing rest: yoga, yoga nidra… (rest as civil disobedience)
- Art: write, sketch, paint, dance, sing, sculpt …
- Explore the interface of narcolepsy and spirituality
- Consider healing work… become sleep and dream experts
Rubin Naiman is truly a pioneer in integrative sleep & dream medicine.
  -- Andrew Weil, MD

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  -- Arianna Huffington

The best prescription for our sleepless patients.
  -- Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD

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