An Epidemic of Dream Deprivation: UA Review Finds Unrecognized Health Hazard of Sleep Loss

UA Center for Integrative Medicine sleep and dream specialist Dr. Rubin Naiman’s comprehensive review of data about the causes, extent and consequences of dream loss includes recommendations for restoring healthy dreaming.

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TUCSON, Ariz. – A silent epidemic of dream loss is at the root of many of the health concerns attributed to sleep loss, according to Rubin Naiman, PhD, a sleep and dream specialist at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, who recently published a comprehensive review of data.

His review, “Dreamless: the silent epidemic of REM sleep loss” in the “Unlocking the Unconscious: Exploring the Undiscovered Self” issue of the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, details the various factors that cause rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and dream loss. Typical sleep follows a pattern in which deeper, non-REM sleep is prioritized by the body. Only later in the night and into the early morning do people experience dreaming, during REM sleep.

“We are at least as dream-deprived as we are sleep-deprived,” noted Dr. Naiman, UA clinical assistant professor of medicine. He sees REM/dream loss as an unrecognized public health hazard that silently wreaks havoc by contributing to illness, depression and an erosion of consciousness. “Many of our health concerns attributed to sleep loss actually result from REM sleep deprivation.”

The review examines data about the causes and extent of REM/dream loss associated with medications, substance use disorders, sleep disorders and behavioral and lifestyle factors. Dr. Naiman further reviews the consequences of REM/dream loss and concludes with recommendations for restoring healthy REM sleep and dreaming.

For more information about Dr. Naiman’s research, please visit drnaiman.com
For more information about the Integrative Health & Lifestyle program (IHeLp) taught by Dr. Naiman at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, please visit azcim.org/ihelp

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