



Dr. Bill Moorcroft



Sleep Problems Update

Number 9

Case Study: Reducing Sleeping Pill Use During Pregnancy

Patient: S.K., a 36 y/o healthy, pregnant woman

Problem: Although S.K. said she has “never been a great sleeper,” her sleep got worse the last four years after she married a man who snored loudly. Although he was successfully treated for sleep apnea eliminating his snoring, S.K. continued to have problems falling asleep and staying asleep resulting in her being tired, more irritable, and

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less able to think and concentrate. Three years ago she started using Ambien, but lately it was only helping her to fall asleep but not keeping her asleep. She was 5 weeks pregnant when came to

see me and concerned about the effect of the drug on her fetus.

Before using Ambien, S.K. had tried Benedryl, alcohol, a hypnosis tape, acupuncture + herbs, Flexeril, and trazadone, all with only temporary or no success.

Diagnosis: Psychophysiological Insomnia (307.42-0) and Hypnotic-Dependent Sleep Disorder (780.52-0).

Treatment: The first thing I did was to make sure that her information and understanding about sleep were accurate. I also emphasized good sleep hygiene as a firm foundation for the Cognitive-Behavioral treatment that was to follow. I next worked on restructuring her thinking about sleep by helping her to change her exaggerated negative thoughts toward being more realistic and more positive. As she worked on this, her anxiety about being able to sleep began to diminish. Next I taught her a relaxing mental focusing exercise to use when wanting to get to or return to sleep. Although it

took her a while for her to learn how to do this, eventually she mastered it and used it to quickly get to sleep. Finally, I taught her a modified version of journaling called “Worry Time for Sleep.” This entailed spending time during the day writing down worries and concerns and processing them. This made it easier for her to dismiss such concerns and worries when they kept her awake at night.

Outcome: In a matter of weeks, S.K. gradually reduced dependence on Ambien yet was able to quickly fall and stay asleep. As a result, her days are much better as she gets more healthy sleep at night. She stated, “It is amazing how much I improved.”

Did You Know?

How Pregnancy Affects Sleep

Upwards of 75% of women report disturbed sleep during pregnancy. Specifically:

- ◆ *13% of women report experiencing sleep changes during the first trimester*
- ◆ *19% during the second trimester*
- ◆ *68% during the third trimester*
- ◆ *11% during the entire pregnancy.*

Most common are:

- ◆ *increases in sleepiness and sleeping during the first trimester*
- ◆ *normal sleepiness but sometimes more awakenings during the second trimester,*
- ◆ *increasingly more awakenings during the course of the third trimester, reaching four or more by the end of pregnancy. However, some women report that their sleep seems to return to normal during the last month of pregnancy.*