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## Sleep disorders you need to keep a check on!

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*Sleepless in the city (Getty Images)*

Sleep disorders can lead to 'sleep divorces' -don't let your marriage suffer snores and more.

Forty-year-old Philip Mathew woke up in the middle of a meeting, frantically gasping for breath. "I couldn't even remember when I had fallen asleep," recalls the self-confessed alcoholic. "That's when I realised that something was wrong. Until then, I ignored my wife's scornful remarks about my weight gain and snores."

Sleep experts say sleep deprivation drives couples apart more often than one would imagine. "Sleep doesn't get due importance in the 24\*7 world that we live in. Constant social media exposure, demanding corporate jobs, increased noise pollution, sedentary lifestyles, substance abuse and travelling across time zones all contribute to sleep disorders," says Dr

Preeti Devnani, clinical director, Sleep Disorder Clinic at the Jaslok Hospital. "Sleep apnea, insufficient sleep and insomnia are highly prevalent, undiagnosed and untreated and have a negative impact on our health and emotional balance." Experts list out a few sleep disorders that partners need to be on the watch out for, to save themselves from a 'sleep divorce'.

### Insomnia

If your partner is unable to fall asleep, wakes up frequently during the night or finds it difficult to fall asleep once awake, then she probably suffers from insomnia. And, as Pune-based boutique owner Deepti Raja points out, it can cause irreversible damage to a relationship. "I'm reconsidering marrying my fiancé," she confides. "He has been working for a US-based multinational for the past two years. He returns from work at 3 am and wakes up at 7.30 am due to noise and light disturbances from outside. His irregular sleeping pattern, the ridiculous amount of coffee he drinks and the lack of exercise has left him feeling tired and irritable."

Tip - Instead of blaming your partner, you must sympathise with him and help seek medical help. Most cases of insomnia can be treated by introducing a few lifestyle changes. If the disorder persists beyond a month, consult a sleep specialist, who will prescribe cognitive and behavioural treatments such as meditation and relaxation training.

### Snoring and sleep apnea

Snoring, say experts, is one of the most prevalent reasons for marital issues. Research shows that about 40 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women are habitual snorers. One snores while experiencing breathing difficulties due to an obstruction in the airway. "But we never consider snoring as a health problem," points out Dr Rahul Modi, consultant ENT surgeon, Hiranandani Hospital, Powai.

"Heavy snoring is directly linked to obstructive sleep apnea, a serious and potentially life-threatening sleep disorder and is a risk factor for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure and many other health problems. Heart rhythm problems are six to 11 times higher in patients with sleep apnea." Although not everyone who snores has sleep apnea, the disorder is characterised by chronic snoring, frequent pauses in breathing while sleeping, gasping for air, depression, exhaustion, dry throat and a decrease in productivity.

Tip - If your partner is feeling depleted or unrefreshed in spite of a full night of sleep, take him or her to the doctor and address the problem with proper guidance before you move out of the bedroom. "The lungs are short of air, so enough oxygen is not transferred to the blood. This leads to low sleep quality. In chronic cases, an overnight polysomnography at a clinic or home is done to determine a treatment plan," says Dr Prashant Chhajed, consultant chest physician. Mild to moderate sleep apnea is

manageable with Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP), an oral appliance therapy, weight loss and/or by elevating the head of the bed or sleeping on the side.

#### Shift work disorder

Here, sleep patterns are not in sync with the body's needs. "Those who work in shifts get less quality sleep than those in regular 9-to-5 jobs. This causes sleepiness and mental lethargy and puts the person's health at grave risk," says psychologist Shruti Save.

Tip - To cope with such irregular shifts, Shruti suggests napping before the limiting night shift, light exposure and gadgets during sleeping hours and eating three meals a day. "Do everything in your capacity to fall asleep in a natural manner. Over-the-counter pills don't reset your body clock in the long run, so avoid taking them often," she says.

#### Parasomnia

The sleep disorder is characterised by unnatural movements, events or experiences while you fall asleep or between sleep stages. Examples include sleep-related eating disorders, nightmares, sleep paralysis, sleepwalking and sleep aggression. "I have clients who wake up in the night, head to the kitchen and eat random ingredients like salt, ginger or butter, but don't recall the events later. Other patients sleepwalk out of their house and start the car. These are classic examples of abnormal parasomnia when the body is active but the mind is not, as opposed to a dreamless sleep when both the body and mind are inactive," says Dr Modi.

Tip - Be there for your partner, instead of ridiculing or recording him/her sleepwalking - that will only embarrass him/her. Put together a regular sleep schedule and a relaxing bedtime routine for the partner. If such issues persist, seek help from a sleep expert.

#### Knowing Narcolepsy

Narcolepsy, a form of hypersomnia, is characterised by uncontrollable sleep attacks in the middle of activities like talking, working, cooking or even driving. The most common symptoms of narcolepsy include excessive daytime sleepiness, loss of muscle control, hallucinations, sleep paralysis and intense emotions.

"People with narcolepsy are lacking in hypocretin or orexin, a chemical in the brain that regulates the sleep-wake cycle," explains senior consultant neurologist and sleep specialist, Dr Manvir Bhatia. The disorder can be diagnosed through a sleep study or polysomnogram, an overnight test that records the electrical activity of your brain and heart, as well as the eye and muscle movement, Multiple Sleep Latency Test (MSLT), which measures how quickly you fall asleep and Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF) analysis.

(By Priya Chapnekar)