Javier has a hard time falling asleep and his lack of sleep made his anxiety worse. He also became fatigued and irritable easily, it really made our lives harder.

Sleep is complex and involves many parts of the brain. A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can cause many different types of sleep problems. We all have an “internal clock” that helps our bodies know when to sleep and wake up. TBI can cause our brain to send these messages at the wrong time.

Too little sleep can increase depression and make auto accidents more likely.

Not getting enough sleep can also lead to poor performance or accidents at work.

Our bodies make chemicals that help control our sleep cycles. A TBI can change the way that these chemicals affect us.

What are you doing up? It’s 3 am!

I couldn’t sleep so I got up to watch a movie and have a beer or two to help me relax.

I didn’t realize that this was still happening. Maybe we should talk to Dr Cushing?

That’s a good idea, I’ll call her tomorrow.

More than half of people with brain injuries have sleep problems. Issues with sleep become more common as people grow older.
NOT BEING ABLE TO FALL ASLEEP IS CALLED INSOMNIA, IT TYPICALLY BECOMES LESS OF A PROBLEM WITH RECOVERY FROM TBI.

Lots of things... anxiety, depression, a medication you’re taking, or even just your bedtime routine. I think your problem may be caused by your TBI.

SO, WHAT CAUSES IT?

IS THERE A PILL I CAN TAKE OR SOMETHING?

THEY ARE MEDICATIONS THAT WILL HELP WITH SLEEP, BUT MANY AREN’T RECOMMENDED FOR PEOPLE WITH TBI.

Good question! Most nonprescription sleeping medications contain anti-histamine, which can cause memory problems and other side effects.

Some other common side effects are trouble learning new things, dry mouth, constipation, retention of urine, or nighttime falls.

Some medications can make sleep more difficult. Drugs for asthma, depression, or daytime drowsiness can all cause insomnia.

On the other hand, some medicines can make people tired during the day.

Often this can be addressed by working with your doctor to adjust when you take your medication or possibly changing your prescription.

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EVALUATING SLEEP PROBLEMS

So, what can I do?

Well, I’d like to do an evaluation of your sleep problems. First I’ll do a physical exam and then we’ll talk about your bedtime routine...

Your Dr will talk to you about your medications and how long you’ve been having sleep problems. They will also explore possible causes of your sleep problems, like pain and depression.

Javier doesn’t have this but, TBI can also change your brain’s control of breathing. That can cause loud snoring and sometimes even brief pauses in breathing during sleep. This is called “sleep apnea.”

Sleep apnea causes your brain to get less oxygen, and that can lead to headaches and fatigue. You are more likely to have sleep apnea if other people in your family have it or if you are overweight.

SLEEP APNEA

Other Sleep Disorders:

Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome...

Is naturally falling asleep and waking later than normal

Narcolepsy...

Makes people fall asleep suddenly and uncontrollably during the day

Post-Traumatic Hypersomnia...

Can cause people to sleep more hours than normal

Restless Leg Syndrome...

Is the urge to move your legs because they’re uncomfortable, especially when sleeping or lying down

Sleepwalking...

Is walking or doing other things while asleep

Excessive Daytime Sleepiness...

Is extreme drowsiness during the day

Bruxism...

Is grinding your teeth at night

Periodic Limb Movement Disorder...

Is involuntary movement of arms or legs during sleep

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LATER...

WELL JAVIER, I THINK THAT YOUR INSOMNIA IS BEING CAUSED BY YOUR ANXIETY. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT TALKING TO A COUNSELOR?  

NOT SURE... NOT REALLY INTO TOUCHY FEELY STUFF.

I GUESS I COULD GIVE IT A SHOT.

GREAT! I’LL GET YOU SOME NAMES ON THE WAY OUT

YOU’LL STAY OVERNIGHT IN A CLINIC WHERE THEY WILL MONITOR YOUR SLEEP CYCLES. THAT WILL HELP ME FIGURE OUT IF YOU HAVE OTHER COMPLICATIONS WITH YOUR SLEEP.

OK, I’LL DO THAT, IF YOU THINK IT WILL HELP.

IT WILL HELP ME PUT TOGETHER A TREATMENT PLAN. IN THE MEANTIME, COUNSELING WILL LIKELY HELP WITH YOUR ANXIETY. HERE’S A LIST OF SOME OTHER THINGS THAT WILL HELP YOU GET BETTER SLEEP.

WHAT CAN I DO?

1) USE AN ALARM TO WAKE YOU UP AT THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY, AND TRY TO GO TO BED AT THE SAME TIME EVERY NIGHT.

2) EXERCISE DAILY - PEOPLE WITH TBI WHO EXERCISE REGULARLY REPORT FEWER SLEEP PROBLEMS.

3) DON’T EAT RIGHT BEFORE BED OR GO TO SLEEP HUNGRY, THAT WAY YOU WON’T WAKE UP BECAUSE YOU’RE TOO HUNGRY OR FULL.

4) DON’T EAT, WATCH TV, OR READ IN BED.

5) IF YOU DON’T FALL ASLEEP IN 30 MINUTES, GET UP AND DO SOMETHING RELAXING OR BORING UNTIL YOU FEEL SLEEPY.

MARY READ THAT SOME PEOPLE FIND THAT NATURAL REMEDIES HELP THEM SLEEP. SOME WORKED FOR ME, OTHERS DIDN’T DO MUCH.

THOSE ARE AVAILABLE AT MOST NATURAL FOOD OR DRUG STORES. BE SURE TO TELL YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU’RE TAKING ANY OF THESE BECAUSE THEY INTERACT WITH SOME MEDICATIONS.
Begin to Improve your sleep by changing your behavior and environment

I made all the changes Dr C suggested and Mary did some research and found some other things that I’ve tried...

I used to have a couple of beers before bed every night so now I avoid drinking too much before bed.

I have a bedtime routine that I do every night before bed.

I’ve cut down on the TV I watch, and I never watch it in bed anymore.

I get outside for some sun everyday, and when it’s cloudy, I use a light box.

I don’t have caffeine or nicotine less than five hours before bed because they are both stimulants that interfere with my sleep.

I’m so glad we talked to Dr. Cushing. Javier’s insomnia made other problems worse: He had trouble thinking and learning things when he wasn’t getting enough sleep. He also got frustrated or angry easily. It was hard for everybody. Things aren’t perfect now but they’re better.

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**Ask Your Dr About These Other Treatments:**

**Sleep Restriction...**

Is restricting the time spent in bed to only when you’re sleeping, this treatment may help to improve your sleep patterns.

**Phototherapy...**

Is the use of special bright lights at strategic times in the day, this treatment can help to have more normal sleep starts and finishes.

https://msktc.org/tbi
AUTHORSHIP AND ILLUSTRATION

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