



**Dr. Bill Moorcroft**



# Sleep Problems Update

Number 14

## *Case Study: Insomnia in a School-Aged Boy*

**Patient:** J.D., an eight year-old healthy boy

**Problem:** J.D.'s mother was concerned because he was not getting enough sleep. She stated that he had never slept well since he was an infant. He did not nap even as a toddler. He typically gets to sleep late and only if his mother snuggles with him. He also wakes 4 to 6 times per night and gets his mother to snuggle with him until he returns to sleep or gets into his parents' bed. The light in J.D.'s bedroom was kept on during the night because he complained that it was "too scary" in the dark.

Following poorer nights of sleep, J.D. yawns a lot and shows frustration when doing homework and manifests ADD-like symptoms in school.

When I spoke alone with J.D., he said that he liked his bedroom and nothing bad ever happened in it. He also said that he wanted to get more sleep because he did not like how sleepy he felt during the day. He admitted that it was "boring to be in his bed" when he was alone, and that he really wanted the light on so he could stay awake.

**Diagnosis:** Behavioral Insomnia of Childhood, Sleep-Onset Association Type (V69.5). J.D. expected to snuggle with his mother and thus had difficulty getting to sleep on his own.

**Treatment:** I recommended that the parents abruptly stop helping J.D.

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getting to sleep by being with him, and that they should turn off the light in his bedroom at bedtime. If he

came into their room during the night, they should quickly lead him back to his bed. I also suggested that they mark on a calendar when he stayed in his room dur-

ing the night and give him a reward following a few good nights. I emphasized the need to be consistent and firm, but gentle in doing these things, even if J.D. showed strong reaction. I explained to J.D. that these things were going to be done and that this would help him get the sleep that he said he wanted.

**Outcome:** A week later I received the following email from J.D.'s mother: "[J.D.] has gone to sleep all by himself and has fallen asleep himself within five minutes for the last 5 nights straight. He has slept through the night without a peep out of him every single night except for the second night when he came into our room around 2am and we said, 'Remember how you are supposed to stay asleep in your room?' He said, 'Oh yeah' and went back to bed on his own and slept through the night. He says he feels more rested, and you are his hero. You are our hero, too!" Subsequent communications confirmed that this improved pattern of sleep has continued.

### Did You Know?

***Sleep problems are frequently undiagnosed in pediatric patients (Pediatrics, June 6, 2001)***

***Common sleep disorders in children have been linked to ADHD (Pediatrics, March 3, 2002)***

***There is a connection between sleep and childhood injury (Pediatrics, February 2, 2001)***

***The most common sleep problems in children are (SleepMatters, Spring 2004):***

***Insomnia***

***Sleep Disordered Breathing (Sleep Apnea)***

***Restless Legs Syndrome***

***Nightmares and Sleep Terrors***

***Sleep Walking and Sleep Talking***

***Bed Wetting***