

LOSING SLEEP

The soft revolution

A 52' documentary by Thierry Robert
Coproducted by ARTE France and SCIENTIFILMS
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Pitch

We are sleeping less and less well... Everywhere, scientists are trying to better understand sleep and to overcome sleeping disorders. Beyond fatigue and irritability, it is proven that such sleeping disorders can cause major health problems. In addition to fatigue and irritability, it is now proven that poor sleep can poison our health. So how can one recover ones precious sleep ? Researchers themselves have been losing sleep on trying to discover the benefits of blue light and naps.



Synopsis

We spend a third of our lives sleeping ... yet, according to studies, 4 out of 10 people in the West complain about sleeping disorders and especially insomnia. Researchers are joining forces around the world to better understand our sleeping mechanisms and to overcome these disorders. New protocols involve exposure to blue light or taking naps... These natural approaches are scientifically grounded and widely acclaimed by soccer playing teams or by the Silicon Valley tech giants.

Sleeping disorders are one of the main reasons for which people consult doctors in Western Europe. Even if we spend a third of our lives sleeping, increasingly, we complain about the poor quality of our sleep: insomnia, shorter sleep cycles, daytime drowsiness and difficulty in catching up on sleep...

The consequences are great: millions of people take leave off work every year which represents a significant loss of several billions of dollars for companies. For 10% of these patients, such disorders end up affecting their entire metabolism: obesity, diabetes, hypertension, etc.



Sleep is essential and yet, we have never slept so little (approximately 6 hours and 50 minutes per night on average) : a disequilibrium that is becoming increasingly difficult to manage. In recent years, scientists have undertaken many clinical trials involving in particular thousands of insomniacs. The goal is to avoid resorting systematically to sleeping pills which have significant side effects and offer only a superficial form of sleep that is not very restorative.

Over time, researchers have returned to common sense, resorting to time-tested techniques while bringing scientific evidence to their effectiveness: fractioned sleep (short naps), light therapy (blue diurnal light to rebalance the circadian rhythm), or helmets that diffuse a weak current to stimulate the right brain hormones ...

Many inexpensive if not free, non-invasive techniques, void of any side effects, are spreading throughout the West. Both on an individual level (thanks to hundreds of sleeping centers that are growing like mushrooms) and on a collective level : the AS Monaco, Google, Facebook and many companies are testing light therapy and napping techniques through innovative systems (nap pods).

There are many ways of making amends with sleep in order to overcome once and for all insomnia and the disorders that disrupt our existence.



Producer's note

Are you struggling to fall asleep? Do you suddenly wake up in the middle of the night, with this feeling that you are choking? Does waking up early in the morning feel like torture? Do you often feel tired during the day?

Well, it seems that you fall into the 40% of the Western population that suffers from sleeping disorders. Most of them complain about « sleep debt. » They never say no to short naps (when possible, and this can be rare). A more serious condition is chronic insomnia which can have negative consequences on our morale (depression) and body (metabolic alterations which cause overweight, high blood pressure, a weakened immune system and early mortality, etc. - studies on this have multiplied over the past years).

Not to mention some very special pathologies, such as narcolepsy (sudden drowsiness that occurs in the middle of the day); sleep apnea, or «restless leg syndrome»...

And yet ... even though we complain about severe sleeping disorders, we spend almost one third of our existence, more than 25 years, sleeping!

Sleep is indeed very paradoxical.

Other great paradoxes: in order to sleep better at night, in the dark, we need a lot of light during the day. And to sleep well, insomniacs need to spend less time ... in bed! These discoveries among many others are interspersed throughout the documentary and reveal the incredibly «dual» nature of our sleep.

REM sleep is an (essential) phase of our sleep cycle and a concrete reality.

This documentary takes us on a journey into an unknown fascinating world. A world that is unknown, precisely because we are rarely conscious when we sleep. A journey through our agitated nights, alternating slow and short cycles, disrupted by the many troubles that interrupt our sleep and, which indirectly disrupt our whole existence.

We will discover the deep roots of our discomfort: why do we sleep less and less well? Studies reveal that we have lost 1 hour and 30 minutes of sleep over the past two generations (we sleep only 6 hours and 48 minutes per night on average, according to the National Institute of Sleep and Vigilance).





The main culprits are tablets and screens that completely disrupt our sleep cycles (preventing the production of melatonin which helps prepare our sleep); but also stress and burn outs. In short, all the ills of our modern society ... Homo sapiens' brain and sleep have not had time to adapt to such rapid mutations. The impossibility to recover ones' sleep can have terrible repercussions, such as drowsiness which causes one third of all fatal road accidents...

How can one improve the quality of one's sleep? Many teams of researchers are coming together to tackle this issue. The goal here is not necessarily to sleep more, but rather to sleep better ... Balancing this equation is of particular interest to armies which want their soldiers to be more alert and to recover fast when they are on the ground.

Specialists multiply studies, such as those focusing on light therapy (Inserm in Lyon and Paris). Such experiments are conducted with high level athletes (the AS Monaco which has just launched a broad program to help its players and team managers recover their sleep) with astounding results. In parallel, other teams are conducting research on multiphase sleep, for example for solo sailors (or how to sleep 5 or 10 times 20 minutes rather than a continuous night). These studies led to recommendations for micro-naps (flash naps or power nap in the US), which are becoming an institutionalized practice in many companies (including Japanese and North American companies such as Google, Uber, Facebook or Procter & Gamble), while China recognizes naps as a constitutional right! Some companies, that are always at the forefront of societal and technological developments offer high tech micro nap modules (nap pods) within their company (cover page photo). Not to mention the profusion of smartphone apps that «accompany» the micro nap with sound and melodies: Power Nap App, Sleep Cycle power nap, Pzizz etc.

From light therapy to flash naps, it seems clear that our sleep is moving in an unexpected direction: sleeping to the rhythm of light! Daylight wavelengths and short power naps could solve many of our troubles.

All these studies, innovative therapies and technological applications, in addition to new molecules that are being designed to replace sleeping pills, embody this "soft-revolution" in the treatment of chronic sleep disorders: with no dependence or side effects.

Fabrice Papillon

Visual treatment



How can one portray this very particular moment of our existence which is like a little death where everything around us seems to come to a standstill? This film (except for scientific demonstrations), as in a waking dream, elevates us and brings us on a stunning journey of discovery, revealing the new solutions and therapies that will repair our wounded sleep.

The film will plunge into the depths of man's sleep. The director will bring us into the straits of time, with visual representations of time passing by : day / night, sunset, dawn, breakfast, a close-up on an alarm clock, a watch, a dial, a smartphone, the pressed springs of a mattress. Lighting will be a key visual element that will be carefully prepared for each sequence, as it is a key disruptor of our biological clock!

Close-up on an eye that opens misted with sleep, the sandman ... synapses. Details of a light bulb that is turned on.

In order to give this film a special rhythm, we will sometimes use a Phantom camera that shoots up to 2000 frames per second and is capable of plunging the viewer into a dream-like universe. This camera will help us focus on details that may seem incongruous to the naked eye, but that will convey meaning and allow us to visualize the invisible! This sweet moment when one slowly sinks into a deep sleep... That moment when one opens the door of our dream... The pulse or the heartbeat that progressively fades away, slows down and falls asleep!

Direct sound will focus on those strange details that populate our nights. The ticking sound of a clock, the second hand of a wristwatch, the dripping of a leaking faucet, the deep breathing of the sleeper, snoring, apnea ... The countryside at night, night birds, the blue hour, the first metro, a city that sleeps at night.

Special attention will be paid to the music of the Icelandic composer Arnar Gudjonsson, with whom the director has worked twice in recent years. An organic and profound music which in itself tells a story. The use of «Shepard's tone» (a process devised by the eponymous cognitive psychologist) will leave a slight impression of dissonance and will convey an auditory illusion to the viewer.

Resorting to an electronic sinusoidal signal system (which involves pure sound) - in which the frequency of each signal is twice as high as the previous one - will give the «illusion» of an indefinitely descending or rising scale.

The music blurs the perception of the viewer, and applied to the images, makes the film really intense!

The different sequences of the film will be shot in situ, whatever the context (laboratories, spectacular experiments, universities or training centers). This will be done in a humanistic way, multiplying perspectives and giving everyone an opportunity to express themselves. Only a few people will be interviewed. Each will be staged and cast in a particular light, in a singular setting which invariably will recall the neural sciences.

Graphics will illustrate some of the experiments and scientific principles. 3D technology will immerse us into the heart of our organism, in the world of sleep, with its neuronal systems, synaptic connections and electric neuronal sparks!

The film will highlight the profile of each sleeper showing that each case is not isolated, whatever the profile of the sleeper. Indeed, today, many of us suffer from agitated sleep. The quantity and quality of our sleep seems mediocre. But researchers are multiplying experiments to facilitate the crucial moment when we fall into the arms of Morpheus, with sometimes astonishing results.

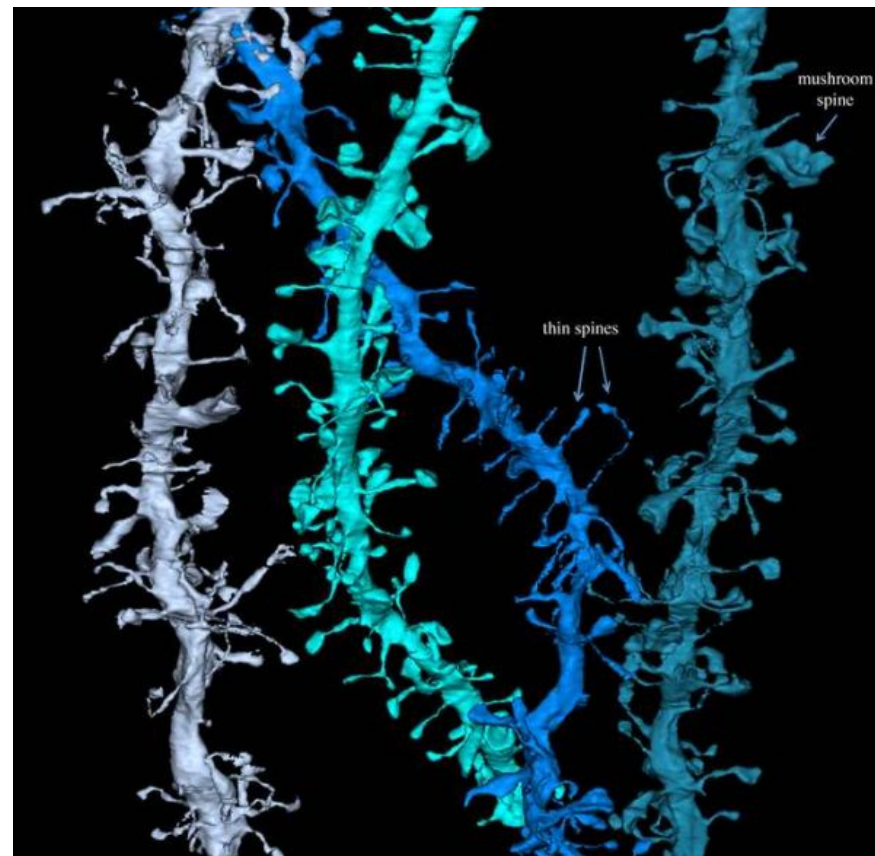
Their goal is to reconcile us with our ancestral sleep, when we used to be connected to the rhythm of nature, day, night, until the invention of fire : the light that interrupted our nights, and unobscured the darkness of our ignorance.

The main challenge is not necessarily to sleep more, but to sleep «better» and for each of us, taking into account our specific differences, to find the key to our sleep. The quality of our days depends on this.

All living beings sleep: humans, animals, plants. For all of them, sleep is vital. Being deprived of sleep can lead to death.

A film about sleep therefore addresses the life that beats deep within us!

Thierry ROBERT



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