

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Danger of dementia through poor sleep with Parkinson

Alarming results of a Canadian cohort study: Every fourth Parkinson patient becomes afflicted with dementia

Immobility, cramps and nightmares - the problems are very diverse that rob Parkinson patients of their sleep. Especially alarming for numerous affected individuals and their next of kin: Studies from Canada now indicate a relationship between sleeping problems and the affliction with dementia with Parkinson patients. Whereas the intake of sleeping medication hardly appears to be advisable here, therapeutic mattresses with micro stimulation system have shown surprising results.

Nearly 300,000 individuals in Germany suffer from Parkinson. At least two out of three patients are additionally affected by massive sleeping disorders. "Die European Parkinson's disease Association even assumes that more than 90% of the afflicted individuals suffer from sleeping disorders, which occur in association with Parkinson", reports Parkinson expert Marion Saller from the Institute for Innovation in Healthcare and Applied Care Research (Institut für Innovation im Gesundheitswesen und angewandte Pflegeforschung), in short: IGAP. Next of kin and doctors are often helpless in the face of this phenomenon. "The sleeping disorders of my husband became increasingly worse over the years. Medication has no longer been helping him for quite some time. It has greatly worried me that through this his overall condition has increasingly deteriorated", explains Erika Weber, whose husband Joachim already became afflicted with Parkinson 14 years ago.

It is not new understanding that sleep deficiency has a negative influence on the progression of diseases of the nervous system. After all, sufficient nightly rest significantly contributes towards allowing the body and mind to regenerate. Especially important thereby are the so-called REM phases, during which individuals have intensive dreams. Scientists assume that during these phases everything experienced during the day is processed and stored. Sleep research has shown that during these times more blood circulates through the brain - an indication that here not only the mental area recuperates but also the nervous system itself. On this background healthy sleep appears to be a real opportunity for Parkinson patients to slow down the progression of their disease. On the other hand, through the lack of the REM phases with sleeping disorders the development of diseases of the nervous system becomes aggravated, to which also dementia is counted. With Parkinson it is however absolutely necessary to undertake everything so that the patient sleeps well.

The administration of synthetic sleeping medication, as in the case of Mr Weber, is however sometimes even counter-productive. Studies show that they massively influence the sleeping behaviour and can thereby suppress the REM phases, which extend over a quarter of the nightly sleeping period. A natural alternative without side-effects is offered by therapeutic mattresses.

Nursing specialist Marion Saller from IGAP explains the mechanism: "Micro stimulation systems exert their effects through the combination of a soft mattress and supporting springs that take up every micro-movement and give these back to the body. The affected individual lies softly but is nevertheless subjected to movement. Micro-movements and body perception are promoted. The lying position is ergonomically correct, which means that here also pain prophylaxis is undertaken."

The mattress has also sustainably helped Mr Weber. He can maintain sleep throughout the night again and feels significantly better during the day. "If only we had heard about this earlier", comments Erika Weber today. The therapy mattresses are available from the tradition-rich company Thomashilfen in Bremervörde.

Info box

Expert advice Therapy mattresses for dementia prevention

"Florence Nightingale already in 1859 not only emphasised the promotion of appropriate sleep, but described the maintenance of the deep sleep as an indispensable requisite for good nursing. Today one can often observe how this priority has become forgotten in clinics and hospitals. As a care provider one can not exert an influence on all areas of the sleep, but one can create overall conditions that allow the best possible sleep [...] Therefore, micro simulation systems cannot only be used in the area of Decubitus prophylaxis and therapy, but also in the area of dementia diseases and with individuals with neurological diseases. They are an optimum support and foundation for healthy sleep."

Marion Saller, Institut für Innovation im Gesundheitswesen und angewandte Pflegeforschung (Institute for innovation in health care and applied nursing research)

Background information for your editorial department

The occasion for the article is a Parkinson cohort study from researchers from Montréal. As was reported in the specialist journal Neurology 2014, a disturbed REM sleep thereby proved to be one of the most significant indicators for the development of dementia. In total 80 individuals at an age of 66 years participated in the study, with whom morbus Parkinson had been diagnosed six years previously. 27 of the patients, therefore 34 percent, developed dementia over the course of the follow-up observation period of 4.5 years. With all of them except for one a previous disorder of the REM sleeping phase had been observed.