

An epidemic of dream deprivation: Review finds unrecognized health hazard of sleep loss

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A silent epidemic of dream loss is at the root of many of the health concerns attributed to sleep loss, according to Rubin Naiman, PhD, a sleep and dream specialist at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, who recently published a comprehensive review of data.

His review, "Dreamless: the silent epidemic of REM sleep loss" in the "Unlocking the Unconscious: Exploring the Undiscovered Self" issue of the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, details the various factors that cause [rapid eye movement](#) (REM) sleep and [dream](#) loss. Typical sleep follows a pattern in which deeper, non-REM sleep is prioritized by the body. Only later in the night and into the early morning do people experience dreaming, during REM sleep.

"We are at least as dream-deprived as we are sleep-deprived," noted Dr. Naiman, UA clinical assistant professor of medicine. He sees REM/dream loss as an unrecognized public health hazard that silently wreaks havoc by contributing to illness, depression and an erosion of consciousness. "Many of our [health concerns](#) attributed to sleep loss actually result from REM sleep deprivation."

The review examines data about the causes and extent of REM/dream loss associated with medications, substance use disorders, sleep disorders and behavioral and lifestyle factors. Dr. Naiman further reviews the consequences of REM/dream loss and concludes with recommendations for restoring healthy REM sleep and dreaming.

More information: Rubin Naiman, Dreamless: the silent epidemic of REM sleep loss, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/nyas.13447](https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13447)

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