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Historically, perhaps no daytime behavior has been more closely associated with better sleep than exercise. The assumption that exercise promotes sleep has also been central to various hypotheses about the functions of sleep. Hypotheses that sleep serves an energy conservation function, a body tissue restitution function, or a temperature down-regulation function all have predicted a uniquely potent effect of exercise on sleep because no other stimulus elicits greater depletion of energy stores, tissue breakdown, or elevation of body temperature, respectively. Exercise offers a potentially attractive alternative or adjuvant treatment for insomnia. Sleeping pills have a number of adverse side effects and are not recommended for long-term use, partly on the basis of a significant epidemiologic association of chronic hypnotic use with mortality. Other behavioral/cognitive treatments are more effective for chronic insomnia treatment, but difficult and costly to deliver. By contrast, exercise could be a healthy, safe, inexpensive, and simple means of improving sleep.

PMID: 15892929 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]