2018

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The Impact of Circadian Misalignment on Cardiometabolic Health

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Abstract

The circadian clock is an endogenous timekeeping system that
insulates and regulates biological processes enabling anticipation and adaptation to daily changes in
the environment. The prevalence of cardiometabolic diseases, which are linked to lifestyle choices, has been rising at an alarming rate. Modernization and globalization are two of many factors to blame for lifestyle changes resulting in circadian disruption. The purpose of this literature review is to explore circadian misalignment with regards to its mechanism and impact on cardiometabolic health and to determine possible interventional measures. The primary focus is on lifestyle change, particularly sleep, as an interventional measure for circadian misalignment. Studies were included if they included a cardiometabolic disease risk factor studied in the context of circadian alignment/misalignment or sleep duration/architecture. The data indicate that circadian misalignment and sleep deprivation impede cardiovascular function and cause a decrease in glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity; however, restoring circadian rhythm and correcting for sleep deprivation improves several health indices including glucose tolerance, insulin sensitivity, blood pressure, and cardiac remodeling.

Introduction

The circadian system serves one of the most important functions present in almost all organisms because it generates a 24-hour rhythm for physiological and behavioral processes enabling anticipation and adaptation to daily changes in the environment (Baron & Reid, 2014). Globalization and modernization, night shift work, and nighttime light exposure have resulted in disruption of sleep which in turn disrupts the circadian system, causing increased prevalence of cardiovascular disorders and metabolic diseases (Chen, H. L., & Lyons, C. L., 2015; Paschos, 2015). The circadian system is vital in the regulation of glucose metabolism; if a disturbance occurs in the circadian system, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases will likely be experienced. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review the literature about causes, effects, and interventions for circadian misalignment. The primary focus of the literature review is to establish whether lifestyle choices and circadian misalignment, can address circadian dysregulation in order to improve an individual’s cardiometabolic profile.

Statement of the Problem

Weight loss, physical activity, and nutritional modification are all lifestyle changes currently recommended for improving cardiometabolic health. However, sleep hygiene is rarely addressed though mounting evidence suggests that both sleep deprivation and circadian misalignment contribute to the development of cardiometabolic diseases.

Research Questions

- Does adequate sleep at the appropriate time have the potential to halt pathological progression and improve cardiometabolic health before overt disease ensues?
- Should adjusting one’s chronotype to reduce sleep debt, social jetlag, and circadian misalignment be included in lifestyle modification recommendations?

Literature Review

- The circadian clock is an endogenous timekeeping system that has evolved to anticipate one’s daily behavioral and physiological needs.
- Circadian misalignment occurs when one’s behavior is misaligned with external environmental cues.
- Circadian misalignment is associated with obesity, insulin resistance, cardiac arrhythmias, and hypertension.
- Buxton et al. (2013) found that glucose levels increased 8% above baseline while subjects were fasting and by 14% above baseline postprandially during circadian disruption accompanied by sleep deprivation and that fasting and postprandial glucose levels returned to normal when circadian rhythm was restored.
- Killick et al. (2015) found that three nights of catchup sleep improves several health indices including glucose tolerance, insulin sensitivity, and postprandial glucose levels.

Discussion

- Weight loss, physical activity, and nutritional modification are all lifestyle changes currently recommended for improving cardiometabolic health; however, sleep hygiene is rarely addressed.
- Individuals experience circadian misalignment when they artificially curtail their weekly sleep via the use of alarm clocks, use artificial light at night, or work a shift adverse to the natural light/dark solar cycle.
- The finding of insulin insensitivity and glucose intolerance has been consistently replicated in individuals who experience circadian misalignment, with or without chronic sleep loss, indicating a close relationship between sleep and cardiometabolic health.
- Sleep extension as a behavioral intervention effectively curbs the development and progression of cardiometabolic disease risk factors.
- The data indicates that circadian misalignment and sleep deprivation impede cardiovascular function and cause a decrease in glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity. Therefore, every effort should be made to reduce the health impact of sleep deprivation by focusing on sleep hygiene and circadian realignment as a means of reducing cardiometabolic disease risk factors.

Applicability to Clinical Practice

Though it is important to address the problem of circadian misalignment in order to slow the ever-increasing prevalence of cardiometabolic diseases, sleep hygiene is rarely recommended as a lifestyle change to reduce cardiometabolic disease risk factors. Extending sleep time by less than one hour each weekend for six weeks in habitually sleep restricted subjects improves insulin sensitivity (Leproult et al., 2015) and lowers both systolic and diastolic blood pressure (Haak et al., 2013). When daily sleep extension is not possible then day off, catch up sleep helps mitigate the adverse consequences of sleep deprivation (Mills et al., 2014). Exploiting the connection between circadian alignment, sleep, glucose tolerance, insulin sensitivity, and blood pressure, by recommending sleep hygiene as a corrective measure is an important step toward curtailing the worldwide epidemic of cardiometabolic disorders.

References


Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Boeringer-Hartung for her enthusiastic encouragement, patient guidance and useful critique of this project. My grateful thanks is also extended to Greg Chirich for his valuable advice and professional guidance. Finally, I wish to thank my mother and my daughter for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my studies.