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The effectiveness of homoeopathic medicines in the management of narcolepsy

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Abstract

Sleep can be defined as a cyclically, circadian recurrent state of reduced motor activity and perception that is accompanied by certain complex changes in physiological activity like fluctuations in certain hormones levels, muscle relaxation etc. Sleepiness is a hazardous, potentially life – threatening condition which not only affects the suffering person, but also his family, friends and surroundings. Homoeopathy and its scientific principles have got great usefulness in treating various sleep disorders as it is comparatively more effectual, low-cost and have no hazardous effects than any other system of medicines.

Keywords: Narcolepsy, sleep disorder, REM sleep, homoeopathy, Hypocretins, Immune system

Introduction

Narcolepsy is diagnosed by group of clinical symptoms of: excessive daytime sleep, cataplexy, disturb night time sleep, sleep- relating hallucinations, dreams, and sleep paralysis. Narcolepsy derived from the Greek words “narco” and “lepsy” means a fit of stupor or stiffness. It was described in 1880 by a French neuropsychiatrist, Gelineau J and for a long time it was considered to be very rare. It is a lifelong, uncommon rapid eye, movement (REM) sleep disorder and of two types:

- Narcolepsy including cataplexy
- Narcolepsy excluding cataplexy

It approximately affects 0.05% of the population. Diagnosis of narcolepsy is mainly done on clinical symptoms, laboratory sleep tests like polysomnography, EEG and serum level of hypocretins or orexins, HLA testing.

Associated clinical features

- Shattered night sleep
- Automatic behaviour
- Concentration and memory loss.
- Blurred vision
- Vivid dreams
- Depression/ anxiety
- Complete retrograde amnesia
- Frequent somnolence
- Loss of muscle tone
- Paralysis
- Irreversible type of sleep attacks during condition like eating or talking.

Epidemiology: Prevalence of narcolepsy 1 varies from 25 to 50 people per 100,000; whereas the prevalence of type 2 narcolepsy is estimated between 20 to 34 per 100,000 people. The prevalence rate is more common in first-degree relative, obese person and those who consume excessive alcohol or other drug abuse. The estimated incidence rate is 0.74/100,000 per year in narcolepsy with cataplexy and 1.37/100,000 per year for both narcolepsy with cataplexy and narcolepsy without cataplexy.

The prevalence more commonly seen in the 2nd decade and equal in both men and women. Most prevalence is about 1 in 2000

Etiopathogenesis

Evidences on the causes of narcolepsy depends mostly on the researches done on genetic, autoimmune and environmental factors. Primary and secondary aetiologies of narcolepsy are:

- Absent or deficient hypocretin.
 - Any lesion in hypothalamus.
 - Inherited disorders e.g. Niemann–Pick disease type C
 - Brain tumours
 - Craniocerebral trauma
 - Cerebrovascular disorders
 - Encephalomyelitis
 - Neurodegenerative diseases
 - Demyelinating disorders
- **Genetic:** Human leukocyte antigens (HLA) DQB1 *0602 can be associated with narcolepsy and carrying the gene increases the risk of it. Polymorphisms in the T-cell receptor may alter immune responses to some antigens can also cause narcolepsy. Most cases can be sporadic also.
 - **Hypocretins:** Hypocretins 1 and 2 also known as orexins A and B, are two types of dorsolateral hypothalamic neuropeptides which function in regulating sleep-wake cycles, and pleasure-seeking behaviour. The neurons which produces these hypocretins are located at locus ceruleus, tuberomammillary nucleus, raphe nucleus, and ventral tegmental areas of the brain. These areas are also related to section of norepinephrine, histamine, serotonin, and dopamine, respectively. Deficiency of this peptide could lead to malfunctioning of these systems and therefore abnormalities of REM sleep and excessive daytime sleepiness. Type 1 narcolepsy is due to the loss of about 90% of hypocretin. The reason behind destruction of hypocretin is unknown.
 - **Autoimmunity:** Recently, methods have developed to demonstrate the presence of autoantibody which hinder colonic migrating motor complexes like some hormonal changes during menopause, psychological stress and some previous viral or bacterial infection. Another study to show autoimmunity aetiology comes from cytokine studies showing increasing interleukin -6, TNF- α , TNF receptor p75 levels in type 1 narcolepsy.

Diagnosis

The International Classification of Sleep Disorders for narcolepsy

- Narcolepsy type 1

Excessive day time sleepiness almost daily for more than 3 months.

Cataplexy and mean sleep latency should be ≤ 8 minutes and ≥ 2 SOREMPs on MSLT

Low or absent CSF hypocretin level

- Narcolepsy without cataplexy

Excessive daytime sleepiness almost daily for at least 3 months but without cataplexy

Diagnosis must be confirmed by polysomnography or MSLT.

Mean sleep latency should be ≤ 8 minutes and ≥ 2 SOREMPs. Hypersomnia is not better explained by another disorder or medication.

Secondary narcolepsy (narcolepsy due to medical condition) Excessive daytime sleepiness almost daily for at least 3 months.

One of the following is present: definite history of cataplexy; if cataplexy is not present, diagnosis must be confirmed by polysomnography and MSLT; mean sleep latency should be ≤ 8 minutes and at least 2 SOREMPs; CSF hypocretin level ≤ 110 pg/mL.

Underlying medical or neurological condition accounts for the sleepiness.

Hypersomnia is not better explained by another disorder or medication.

Homoeopathic Management for Narcolepsy

Homoeopathy provides a much better treatment for those who are suffering from narcolepsy because it aim at completely curing the disease. Some are the following homoeopathic medicines used in the management of such condition:

- **Agaricus muscarius:** Paroxysms of yawning, followed by involuntary laughter. Drowsy at daytime with twitches and wakes up often.
- **Ammonium carbonicum:** Sleepiness during the day, strangulated.
- **Antimonium crudum:** Excessiveness drowsiness in old people.
- **Brucea antidysenterica:** Sleepiness entire day, highest in afternoon, full of dreams. Confused, terrible dreams disturb sleep. Sleepiness alternates with want of appetite.
- **Calcarea carbonica:** Hallucinations with drowsy in early part of evening. Wake multiple time at night. Horrible dreams like of the dead.
- **Cannabis indica:** Catalepsy with obstinate type of insomnia where no cause is traced. Nightmare, sleepy but unable to do so.
- **Hydrocyanicum acidum:** Irresistible drowsiness accompanying with vivid, unclear dreams, yawning and shivering. Tetanus narcolepsy
- **Kali phosphoricum:** Sleepy, yawning that eyes hurt so much with mumbling and talking in sleep. Remain awake during latter part of night.
- **Lycopodium clavatum:** Drowsy during the day with starting in sleep. Vivid dreams of accidents.
- **Natrum carbonicum:** Wakes up early in morning with continuous drowsiness and amorous dreams.
- **Nux vomica:** This medicine helps to get relief in irritability, sleeplessness at about 3 a.m., and digestive troubles associated with overindulgence in food, tobacco or alcohol.
- **Opium:** Excessive sleepiness yet cannot go to sleep with profound coma. Loss of breath while sleeping. Disturbance from noises from distant places, cocks crowing etc.
- **Phosphorus:** Drowsiness after meals with dreams of fire, haemorrhage, lasciviousness. Go for short naps of sleep and then wake up frequently.
- **Sulphur:** Unable to sleep between 2 and 5 a.m. with vivid dreams and slightest noise awakens. Frequently

waking and suddenly wide awake. Catnaps, talks, jerks and twitches during sleep.

Discussions and Conclusion

Understanding of the pathogenesis of narcolepsy continues to advance, with substantial evidence and research. Future treatment such as hypocretin analogs and histamine receptor antagonists, should aim to tackle the cause of narcolepsy in modern medicine, but considering Homeopathy for treatment of different types of narcolepsies can help to maintain a good life style and make the prognosis positive. Homoeopathic remedy effects on complex living systems may be regulatory or adaptogenic overall, rather than unidirectional, in restoring homeostasis, normal sleep cycle and brain activities. Homoeopathic treatment along with proper, healthy diet, lifestyle changes, relaxation techniques and counselling provide marked improvement in the symptoms of narcolepsy. Definitely, this takes sometimes as our body's immune system has to go back into original form and it recognizes its own body as a friend again. It is scientifically and natural treatment for any kind of sleep disorder without any steroid or hypnotic drug.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

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Not available

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