

This Sleep Advice from the 1800s is Really Bizarre

By Paige Towers • May 19, 2016 at 3:30pm

SHARE ON FACEBOOK TWEET TUMBLR EMAIL

Oh, 19th century: such a simpler time it was. People didn't snap selfies with avocado toasts, type out blog posts about the real meaning of "Netflix and chill" or have to worry about a little thing called blue light. Too bad science was simple, with books proclaiming the magic of phrenology, the "low intelligence of women" and other generally upsetting scientific malarkey. Sleep and all its intricacies were also starting to become a popular topic of discussion, and while there were some decent revelations on the subject (segmented sleep!) there were also some very unsettling methods prescribed by doctors of the day (make uggo kids sleep on stiff boards!) We found some choice nuggets of "wisdom" that illustrate how little they knew about rest. Read on and be thankful you live in modern times.

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 1/12

also

1. Do you have weak, grosslooking children? Make 'em sleep on hard beds

The Medical Adviser and Guide to Health and Long Life,

which was edited by Alex Burnett, M.D. and published in 1824, provided (along with short, funny quips about the adventures of “buying” female concubines in Turkey) sleep advice for the world’s unfortunate “scrofulous children” — meaning children who have a diseased, run downlooking appearance and/or are morally contaminated. As stated in the text, a scrofulous boy should:

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=Uu0EAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA292&dq#v=onepage&q=Scrofulous&f=false>

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=Uu0EAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA292&dq#v=onepage&q=Scrofulous&f=false>

(180181)

This section also goes on to bitterly lament the fact that the government hasn't restricted diseased people from getting married. Aren't you glad you live in the current millennium?

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 2/12

2. If you're a peasant, then divide your sleep into two equal chunks. If you're of the dandier sect of society, one chunk is completely fine

As the historian A. Roger Ekirch extensively covers in his book, "At Day's Close: Night in Times Past,

” segmented sleep was quite commonplace in preindustrial times. People would fall asleep in the late evenings and then wake shortly after midnight, at which time they'd do whatever late night activity they wanted (read by candlelight, clean, eat, pray, have sex). After a few hours of making the most of pastmidnight hours, people would then fall back asleep until a more reasonable daylight waking hour.

Depriving yourself of sleep began a game of one upmanship that still continues today; the less you slept every night, the more noble and important you were.

After the Industrial Revolution came about, bringing electric light with it, this notion of slicing up your sleep into two parts

started to lose favor. “First sleep” and “second sleep” were still widely practiced, but doctors started questioning the need for it, thus beginning our modern #sleeporexia. Depriving yourself of sleep began a game of oneupmanship that still continues today; the less you slept every night, the more noble and important you were.

For instance, “ The Philosophy of Living,

” published in 1837 by Herbert Mayo — senior surgeon of the Middlesex Hospital in the UK at the time — includes the following advice about segmented sleep:

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s/4/12>

https://books.google.com.au/books?id=wZ8_AAAAcAAJ&pg=PA173&dq=#v=onepage&q&f=false

(173)

So, what do we learn here? Well, for one thing, “relaxing” had a totally different meaning in the 19th century. For another, if you sleep from say, 8:30 p.m. to 1 a.m., then you should be able to rise with a brisk and cheery readiness, ready to start your very

gentlemanly day. No matter that all those sleep greedy peasants won't be up selling valuable wares like coffee for another six hours; you can totally use this time to read up

11/10/2016 Medical Advice on Sleep in the 19th Century Now Seems Mindblowing | Van Winkle's

on the most fanciful theories on, say, miniature horse hoof care, or the prowess and dexterity of men.

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 5/12

Twins (Grace and Kate Hoare) by Sir John Everett Millais, 1876

3. Do the respectable thing and don't "indulge" in sleep

11/10/2016 Medical Advice on Sleep in the 19th Century Now Seems Mindblowing | Van Winkle's

Dr. Mayo really wants to hammer this idea home that sleep deprivation is 100 percent doctorapproved:

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s/6/12>

https://books.google.com.au/books?id=wZ8_AAAAcAAJ&pg=PA173&dq=#v=onepage&q&f=false

(173)

In his favor, Dr. Mayo did say that up to nine hours is fine, but he goes on to write about how that amount is only applicable to day laborers, aka peasants, slaves, men who don't sit around smoking long wooden pipes and ladies who aren't afraid to get their lace gloves dirty.

But don't think that Dr. Mayo was the only one addressing this notion of how much sleep one should get. In a Welsh newspaper,

The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality,

an

article simply titled "Sleep" appeared on January 29th, 1829.

It reads as follows:

11/10/2016 Medical Advice on Sleep in the 19th Century Now Seems Mindblowing | Van Winkle's

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 7/12

<http://newspapers.library.wales/view/4461075/4461077/13/>

The member of the medical community consulted for the article is unknown, but we have to commend him (yeah, it's totally a dude), for starting the shamewagon that's somehow still hitched to sleep two centuries later. Not only were people who were sleeping past 3 or 4 a.m. "indulgent," but they have now been compared to alcoholics and overeaters. Womp womp.

4. Hey old folks: Layer up so you don't die in bed!

Dr. Mayo, that condiment named senior surgeon from before, also provided his faithful geriatric readers with some no

nonsense advice on how not to die in your sleep.

As quoted from someone
named Dr. Rush

:

https://books.google.com.au/books?id=wZ8_AAAAcAAJ&pg=PA173&dq=#v=onepage&q&f=false

(169)

Sure, it's nice to remind old people to stay warm while sleeping, but apparently the use of tact — especially when talking about the possibility of you dying tonight — didn't come around for another few decades.

5. Prone to farting during the night? No second sleep for you.

The link between indigestion and sleep was a hot topic issue in the 1800s, most likely because the likes of Tums and Pepcid AC had yet to make their grand debuts. The

*Dublin Journal of Medical
Science,*

Volume 54, which was published in 1872, advised the following regarding “emissions:”

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 8/12

(23)

So it's okay to tell old people that it's common for them be found as corpses the morning after a cold night, but a man sending off some scud missiles in his sleep is, you know, "disposed to emissions?" We don't get it either.

6. Have insomnia? Tough noogies.

In the Welsh newspaper,

Evening Express, an article appeared on December 15th, 1896 titled "Insomnia and Drugs."

It first reported on how a "Dr. Tom Robinson" told an audience that "first sleep was ever the best." (Dr. Mayo would have probably raised his whiskey tumbler and said, "here here, good fellow.") But the crux of the article focused on insomnia and this so

11/10/2016 Medical Advice on Sleep in the 19th Century Now Seems Mindblowing | Van Winkle's

called Dr. Robinson had some notsonice things to say about it:

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 10/12

<http://newspapers.library.wales/view/3267250/3267254>

So, if insomnia is the indigestion of the brain, and those who seek drugs in alleviation of the malady lower the quality of their blood as well as their moral character...does this mean that if you chronically can't sleep you just have to resign yourself to neverending nights of sitting in a parlor, reading about miniature horse hoof care by candlelight? Also, what if you have sleep farts insomnia? What then? and

7. Hey ladies: The rules of menfolk don't apply to you.

Dr. Mayo — like most male doctors/scientists/journalists/politicians/breathing humans of the 19th century — tried to write about women as rarely as possible. Unless, that is, the writing involved theories about their fragility and nerves. Dr. Mayo did, however, decide to touch on women (as opposed to just humans) and sleep in one short paragraph. He wrote:

https://books.google.com.au/books?id=wZ8_AAAAcAAJ&pg=PA173&dq=#v=onepage&q&f=false

Get that #hardeight, ladies.

8. Malt Liquor: Good for the fetus!

Women were also instructed on how to sleep when pregnant in

The Medical Adviser and Guide to Health and Long Life,

which was edited by Alex Burnett, M.D. and published in 1824:

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 11/12

11/10/2016 Medical Advice on Sleep in the 19th Century Now Seems Mindblowing | Van Winkle's

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=Uu0EAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA292&dq#v=onepage&q=Scrofulous&f=false>

(293)

Today, common medical advice has switched this up a bit. Women: if you're pregnant and having to leave the room to vomit every time you get a whiff of a smell of eggs or whatever, then at least make sure to sleep on whatever you darn please. And whoa, Dr. Burnett, go easy on the italics.

<http://vanwinkles.com/themostmindblowingmedicaladviceonsleepfromthe1800s> 12/12