Sleep and dreams

Activity 2B & 2C (CD 2 Tracks 11 & 12, 2 minutes 50 seconds)

Susan: Dr. Richard Taylor is the director of the National Sleep Center. He's here to answer your questions on sleeping and dreaming. Welcome, Dr. Taylor.

Dr. Taylor: Oh, thank you, Susan.

Susan: Now, first, a question from Amy in Baltimore. Do women sleep less than men?

Dr. Taylor: Ha-ha! Well, that's a good question, Amy! No, actually, there's no difference.

Susan: Now here's one from Bob in Denver. Does a sound sleeper move less than a light sleeper?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Bob, people move around while they're trying to get comfortable before they fall asleep. But when they're asleep, mm, some people stay pretty still while others move quite a bit. It has nothing to do with how soundly they sleep.

Susan: And how much sleep do we need, Dr. Taylor?

Dr. Taylor: There are a few people who need only a few hours, Susan, but most of us need eight hours. If we don't get eight hours, we feel sleepy during the day.

Susan: Actually, I find it hard to get to sleep. What's the best cure for insomnia? Sleeping pills?

Dr. Taylor: Oh-ho, no, that's the worst thing you can do. The best cure is to try to make your mind a blank. Think of white clouds or green trees. What works for many people is reading. Read a book until you feel sleepy. Then you can turn off the light, and you'll be asleep in no time!

Susan: Thank you. Now this next question is from Tom in Cleveland. How many dreams does a person usually have in one night?

Dr. Taylor: Uh-huh. Well, Tom, some people will tell you that they never dream, but everyone dreams. In fact, the average person has about four dreams per night, but some may have up to as many as seven dreams in one night. During a full eight-hour sleep, two hours of it is spent dreaming. But many people can't remember anything that they dream about. That's why they think they don't dream at all.

Susan: Now we have a question from Wilma in Portland. Is it true that eating before bed can give you bad dreams—you know, nightmares?

Dr. Taylor: Ah, well, Wilma, lots of people say that. But there's no evidence of this at all. A big meal may stop you from getting to sleep in the first place, though. But there's nothing wrong with a snack or a hot drink.

Susan: But not coffee or tea.

Dr. Taylor: Oh-ho! No! Ha-ha.