

Sleep Well

Be well, Do well, Live well
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A Special Edition of SLEEP WELL

January 2021

CONTINUINGeducation



ACEs, Integrative Medicine, and the Mind Body Connection

Why Dental Sleep Practitioners Must
Take a Seat at This Table

by Sunita Merriman, DDS

“What is spoken of as a clinical picture is not just a photograph of a sick man in bed; it is an impressionistic painting of the patient surrounded by his home, his work, his relations, his friends, his joys, sorrows, hopes and fears. Now all of this background of sickness which bears so strongly on the symptomatology is liable to be lost sight of in the hospital.”¹

Happy New Year!

A new year brings us the opportunity to create a fresh narrative for our lives.

This Special Edition of SLEEP WELL also comes with a paradigm expansion of the role of [Dental Sleep Medicine](#), (DSM) in healthcare, as DSM can play an important role in the recognition, diagnosis, and integrative treatment of individuals who have suffered from Adverse Childhood Experiences, [ACEs](#),

Integrative care is all about connecting the dots.

In this continuing education article written for [Dental Sleep Practice, Winter 2020 Issue](#), I connect the dots between [ACEs, their long- term impact on health in adulthood](#), sleep, and DSM.

It is, I hope, the start of a conversation about how DSM can become an integral part of the sweeping movement of recognizing and addressing ACEs, and their impact on the life long health and mortality of an individual. It is also my intention to help build a bridge between Dental Sleep Professionals, DSP and members of trauma- informed, integrative care teams.

Patients routinely enter dental sleep practices with issues that can complicate treatment of Obstructive Sleep Apnea, OSA and which may not be evident upon physical exam or diagnostic evaluations. Emotional trauma may adversely impact sleep quality, treatment compliance, and overall health. Understanding how to identify these issues and associated comorbidities, discuss them with patients, refer them to mental health professionals when appropriate, and recognize what impact they are having on treatment outcomes is crucial to providing comprehensive integrative care.

DSM has much to offer to the field of trauma informed, interprofessional diagnosis, and treatment of patients. Medical and mental health professionals must be sensitive to the increased prevalence of sleep disorders amongst their patients, who come to them with a history of ACEs. Having a clear understanding of what [DSM and Oral Appliance Therapy](#) is, and how it works is the first step . Building a close working relationship with a trauma- informed DSP is the next step. The resulting collaboration between these professionals will increase their ability to help patients achieve overall wellness, by prioritizing their sleep health,

alongside their medical, psychic, and emotional issues.

With what we know now about ACEs, healthcare and healing must begin with a shift to asking, “what happened to you?” rather than “what’s wrong with you?”

[ACEs, Integrative Medicine, and the Mind Body Connection- Why Dental Sleep Practitioners Must Take a Seat at This Table- DSP Winter 2020 CE Article by Sunita Merriman, DDS, D-ABDSM, D-ABCDSM](#)



Some Resources and Information about ACEs and the Mind- Body Connection

[What's your ACEs score?](#)

61% of adults have had at least one Adverse Childhood Experience. Knowing your ACE score is a critical piece of information that helps you navigate the needs of your mind and body health.

[Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Bruce D. Perry, Jello, Love and Childhood Trauma- They're Connected.](#)

TEDMED 2018 Dr. Nadine Burke Harris - How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime.

Childhood trauma isn't something you just get over as you grow up. Pediatrician Nadine Burke Harris explains that the repeated stress of abuse, neglect and parents struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues has real, tangible effects on the development of the brain. This unfolds across a lifetime, to the point where those who've experienced high levels of trauma are at triple the risk for heart disease and lung cancer. An impassioned plea for pediatric medicine to confront the prevention and treatment of trauma, head-on.

This Special Edition of SLEEP WELL is Personal

I am a survivor of ACEs, and complex childhood trauma. I healed when I sought professional help. I am now committed to bringing awareness to ACEs, offering hope to those who suffer from ACEs, and eliminating the stigma associated with trauma, depression, anxiety and mental illness. In addition, I am engaged in sharing my personal and professional insights with my colleagues in the dental, medical and healing professions, of how [ACEs](#) impact sleep, and how Dental Sleep Medicine can be a part of the solution.

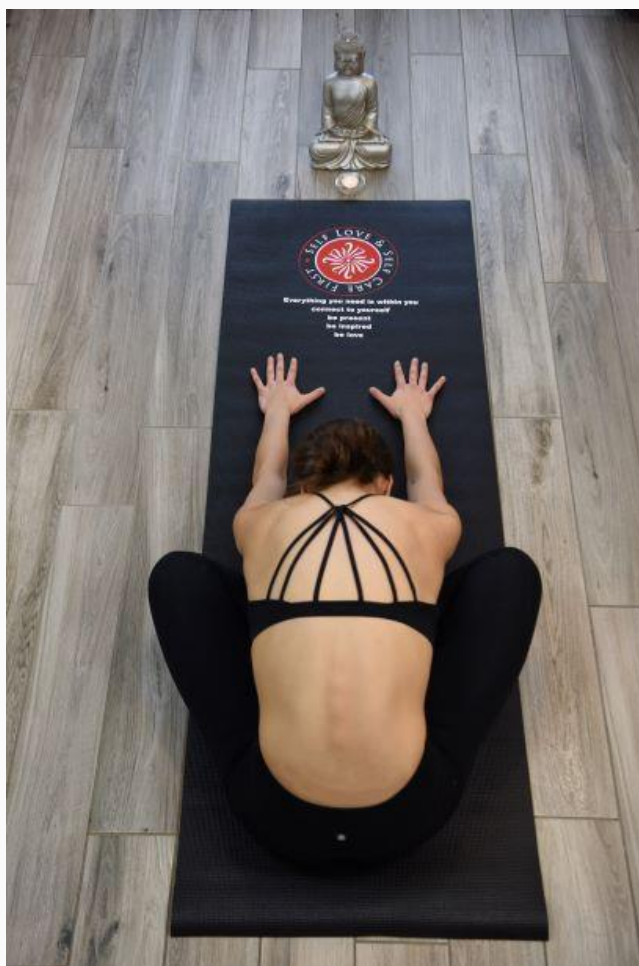
My goal is to promote trauma informed, interdisciplinary, and integrative care that respects the mind-body connection.

My Gratitude

I am indebted to all my teachers and mentors, and sincerely thank the researchers who are cited, and those who permitted me to reprint their work to support the information in this article. My deep appreciation goes to the team at [Dental Sleep Practice](#) for this opportunity to contribute. Lastly, I make special mention of the Editor-in-Chief of DSP, Jason Tierney, without whose endless encouragement and support, the unconnected dots would still reside in my mind.

-Sunita Merriman, DDS

"The function of freedom is to free someone else." - Toni Morrison



Sleep Tip

Yoga is a gentle and restorative way to wind down your day. A [national survey](#) found that over 55% of people who did yoga found that it helped them get better sleep. Over 85% said yoga helped reduce stress.

This is in addition of the many other benefits, both physical and mental, that yoga offers us.

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“Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.” -Thomas Dekker

Dr. Sunita Merriman is the Founder of NJDSMC, [New Jersey Dental Sleep Medicine Center](#) in Westfield, New Jersey. She graduated from New York University, College of Dentistry with honors in 1994. This was followed by a 2 year General Practice Residency at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park, New York, and a mini- residency at the American Academy of Craniofacial Pain. Dr. Merriman is a Diplomate of both the ABDSM, American Board of Dental Sleep Medicine, and the ABCDSM, American Board of Craniofacial Dental Sleep Medicine. She is on Staff at Overlook Medical Center in Summit, NJ and involved with presentations at the Sleep Fellowship Program at JFK Medical Center. Sunita is also a poet and a writer. Her first book of poetry *Stripping- My Fight to Find Me* is available at her website [SunitaMerriman.com](#) and [Amazon](#). She writes a blog at [selfloveselfcarefirst.com](#)



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