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# Evaluation and Management of Sleep Disorders in the Hand Surgery Patient.

Michael P. Gaspar

Thomas Jefferson University, [michaelpgaspar@gmail.com](mailto:michaelpgaspar@gmail.com)

Patrick M. Kane

Thomas Jefferson University, [patrick.kane@jefferson.edu](mailto:patrick.kane@jefferson.edu)

Sidney M. Jacoby

Thomas Jefferson University, [sidney.jacoby@jefferson.edu](mailto:sidney.jacoby@jefferson.edu)

Patrick S. Gaspar

Harborside Surgical Center

A. Lee Osterman

Thomas Jefferson University, [a.osterman@jefferson.edu](mailto:a.osterman@jefferson.edu)

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1 **Title:**  
2 Evaluation and Management of Sleep Disorders in the Hand Surgery Patient  
3

4 **Running Title:**  
5 Sleep Disorders in Hand Surgery  
6

7 **Authors and affiliations:**

8  
9 Michael P. Gaspar, MD<sup>a</sup>  
10 michaelpgaspar@gmail.com  
11

12 Patrick M. Kane, MD<sup>a</sup>  
13 pmkkane@gmail.com  
14

15 Sidney M. Jacoby, MD<sup>a</sup>  
16 smjacoby@handcenters.com  
17

18 Patrick S. Gaspar, MD<sup>b</sup>  
19 patrickgaspar@yahoo.com  
20

21 A. Lee Osterman, MD<sup>a</sup>  
22 alosterman@handcenters.com  
23

24  
25 <sup>a</sup> The Philadelphia Hand Center, P.C.  
26 Thomas Jefferson University  
27 Department of Orthopedic Surgery  
28 The Franklin Suite G114  
29 834 Chestnut Street  
30 Philadelphia, PA 19107, USA  
31

32 <sup>b</sup> Harborside Surgical Center  
33 Department of Anesthesiology  
34 Oxon Hill, MD  
35

36 **Corresponding Author:**

37 Michael P. Gaspar, MD  
38 The Philadelphia Hand Center, P.C.  
39 The Franklin Suite G114  
40 834 Chestnut Street  
41 Philadelphia, PA 19107  
42 michaelpgaspar@gmail.com  
43 (804) 363-9157  
44

45 **Key Words:**

46 Insomnia; Sleep Disorders; Hand Surgery; Carpal tunnel syndrome; Obstructive Sleep Apnea  
47

48 **Abstract**

49 Despite posing a significant public health threat, sleep disorders remain poorly understood  
50 and often mismanaged. Though seemingly unrelated, hand surgeons should be particularly  
51 mindful of sleep disorders, as numerous conditions of the upper extremity have known  
52 associations with sleep disturbances which can adversely affect patient outcomes, function  
53 and satisfaction. In addition, patients with sleep disorders are at significantly higher risk  
54 for severe, even life-threatening medical co-morbidities, further supporting the important  
55 role of hand surgeons in the recognition and management of sleep disorders that are most  
56 common in hand surgery.

57

58 **Introduction**

59 Sleep disorders are a major public health concern, affecting as many as 70 million adults in  
60 the United States alone, while accounting for billions of dollars in financial costs, disability,  
61 and even death. [1-5] Sleep disorders are also associated with a myriad of medical  
62 conditions including obesity, hypertension, diabetes heart disease, and overall higher  
63 mortality risk. [6]

64  
65 Unfortunately, despite these exorbitant socioeconomic and health costs, sleep disorders are  
66 often overlooked or improperly treated. [7,8] In hand surgery, numerous conditions have  
67 known associations with sleep disorders, and sleep symptoms can directly affect patient  
68 outcomes, function and satisfaction. Thus, these disorders are important for hand surgeons  
69 to recognize and manage. The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of sleep  
70 disorders that are most common in hand surgery, with focus on the preoperative  
71 evaluation, and perioperative management of these disorders.

72

73

74 **Sleep Disorders in Hand Surgery**

75 This discussion will focus primarily on two classes of disorders most relevant to hand  
76 surgery: (1) *dyssomnias* which are disorders that produce excessive sleepiness or difficulty  
77 in initiating or maintaining sleep and (2) sleep disorders associated with other medical  
78 disorders. [9] A more inclusive outline of general sleep disorders is presented in [Figure 1](#).

79

80 ***Intrinsic Dyssomnias***

81 Intrinsic dyssomnias either (a) originate or develop within the body, or (b) arise  
82 from causes within the body. [9] This group includes psychological or medical disorders  
83 that *produce* a primary sleep disorder.

84

85 ***Obstructive Sleep Apnea***

86 Perhaps the most widely recognized intrinsic dyssomnia in surgical patients is obstructive  
87 sleep apnea (OSA). Patients with OSA who are to undergo surgery require specialized  
88 management, as these patients are at higher risk for adverse events in the intraoperative

89 and postoperative periods. In the perioperative setting, the primary concern is airway  
90 management; due to OSA patients' decreased ability to protect their airway, procedures  
91 that would otherwise be performed under sedation may require monitored anesthesia care  
92 (MAC) or even general anesthesia for. [10,11] Ideally, open communication between the  
93 anesthesiologist and the hand surgeon allows these determinations to be made prior to the  
94 day of surgery, so as to minimize delays or complications.

95  
96 In addition to patients with a known diagnosis of OSA, surgeons are often tasked with  
97 caring for patients who lack a formal diagnosis, despite exhibiting clinical risk factors for  
98 OSA. [12] Chung et al reported an alarming 66% of patients lacking a preoperative OSA  
99 diagnosis with difficult intubations were confirmed to have OSA upon further evaluation.  
100 [13] Mutter et al found that those patients with undiagnosed OSA were at significantly  
101 higher risk of postoperative cardiac arrest than confirmed OSA patients, and that both  
102 groups fared worse than non-OSA patients. [14] These studies together point out the  
103 importance for the hand surgeon to recognize and screen for OSA, which can be done  
104 utilizing validated OSA screening methods, such as the STOP-Bang questionnaire (Table 1).  
105 Surgeons should also have a low threshold for referring patients with positive findings on  
106 OSA screening for further evaluation. [13,15] Postoperative management of OSA patients is  
107 also critical in avoiding morbidity, and OSA patients should resume continuous- or bilevel  
108 positive-airway-pressure (CPAP or BiPAP) treatment as soon as they are able. [15]  
109 Postoperative pain control regimens in OSA patients also merit special attention, which will  
110 be discussed shortly.

111

### 112 ***Extrinsic Dyssomnias***

113 Extrinsic dyssomnias are those that originate or develop from causes outside of the body.  
114 [9] External factors are necessary to produce these disorders, and their removal is often  
115 therapeutic to the sleep disturbance. [9] In hand surgery, these most notably include both  
116 drug-induced and drug-dependant sleep disorders.

117

118 *Opioid-Induced Sleep Disorders*

119 A true understanding of the complex interplay of pain, opioid medication, and sleep  
120 disturbance remains elusive. Although evidence shows that pain and sleep exhibit a  
121 circular relationship with one another (i.e. pain causes sleep disturbance and sleep  
122 disturbance intensifies pain), [16-19] opioids used to concomitantly treat both pain and  
123 secondary sleep disorders are not always successful. [20,21]

124

125 Opioid receptors in the brain are located in the same nuclei that are active in sleep  
126 regulation and abnormal sleep architecture has been reported as a characteristic feature of  
127 opioid use, with a reduction of rapid eye movement (REM), slow wave sleep stages, and  
128 overall sleep quality. [18,20,22] Opioid use in OSA patients can be particularly  
129 troublesome, as opioids not only impair arousal, but can worsen airway obstruction, even  
130 in non-OSA patients. [21,23,24] Thus, alternative multimodal pain management  
131 approaches are recommended to minimize the need for opioids for OSA patients. These  
132 include: regional or local anesthesia when appropriate, continuous peripheral nerve  
133 blockade, and non-opioid analgesics such as acetaminophen and NSAIDs. [15,23,25-27]  
134 Recent evidence also supports use of low-dose ketamine or adjuvant clonidine injections  
135 to potentiate local or regional nerve blocks. [23,28,29] Finally, conservative measures  
136 aimed at decreasing postoperative pain and inflammation such as icing, elevation, and  
137 compression should be emphasized, especially upon discharge home.

138

139 *Sedative-Dependent Sleep Disorders*

140 The use of short-acting sedative-hypnotics, particularly non-benzodiazepine sedative  
141 hypnotics (NBSH, e.g. zolpidem), for treatment of insomnia has increased markedly in  
142 recent decades. [30] Generally intended to treat short-term insomnia, NBSH  
143 discontinuation may precipitate rebound insomnia, lasting up to weeks in extreme cases, or  
144 after taking a single dose. [31-33] Thus, the dependency potential is relatively high. [34-36]  
145 Use of zolpidem as a postoperative sleep aid or pain-adjuvant has recently been described  
146 following knee and shoulder surgery with reported success in improving sleep quality and  
147 function, while decreasing opioid requirements, pain and fatigue. [37-39] However, none of  
148 these studies reported patient outcomes beyond the acute treatment period. [37-39] Its

149 similar utility in hand surgery has not been reported. Perhaps surprisingly, antihistamines  
150 used as sleep aids may warrant similar caution. [41] A recent survey of patients who took  
151 the commonly-used sedative H1 antihistamine doxylamine found the majority of patients  
152 used the medication daily for at least six months, including 77% who experienced rebound  
153 insomnia when attempting to discontinue use. [41] These findings suggest that sedative  
154 hypnotics and antihistamines should be used with judiciously in hand surgery patients  
155 with sleep disorders.

156

### 157 **Sleep Disorders Associated with Mental, Neurologic, or Other Medical Disorders**

158 This second category includes a variety primary medical disorders that *secondarily* involve  
159 sleep disturbance or excessive sleepiness as a major clinical feature, [9] including several  
160 hand and upper extremity conditions.

161

#### 162 *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome*

163 Insomnia is a nearly universal finding in patients with carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), often  
164 serving as the primary motivating factor for seeking surgical care. [42-48] Although the  
165 mechanism linking these two conditions is unclear, McCabe and colleagues reported that  
166 patients with CTS are more likely to prefer sleeping on their side compared to control  
167 patients. [42-44] The authors acknowledge, however, that these associative findings do not  
168 necessary prove causation. In an effort to further characterize the severity of sleep  
169 disturbance in CTS patients, Patel et al prospectively studied patients with CTS and found  
170 that 78% of patients met the threshold for poor sleep quality using the Pittsburgh Sleep  
171 Quality Index (PSQI), a validated sleep-quality outcome measure. [46,49,50] The authors  
172 also noted a positive correlation between CTS-related functional impairment and severity  
173 of sleep symptoms. [46] The authors did not study the potential association of preoperative  
174 electrodiagnostic findings with sleep symptom severity, nor did they investigate the  
175 potential therapeutic effect of median nerve decompression on sleep symptoms. Both of  
176 these associations may warrant further study, as the ability to predict relief of sleep  
177 symptoms following decompressive surgery would allow clinicians to better tailor  
178 management for CTS patients whose primary complaints are sleep-related.

179

180 *Rheumatoid Arthritis and Other Inflammatory Arthropathies*

181 Sleep disturbances in patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) are multifactorial,  
182 codependent on pain, fatigue, and depression. [51-53] In a prospective analysis of RA  
183 patients seen at an outpatient clinic, Løppenthin et al reported that 61% met criteria for  
184 poor sleep using the PSQI. [52] Westhovens et al found that RA disease activity showed  
185 significantly positive correlation with worsening sleep symptoms, [53] while Fragiadaki et  
186 al reported improvement in sleep symptoms in a series of 15 RA patients treated with  
187 tocilizumab, [54] together suggesting that primary management of underlying RA activity  
188 may serve as an optimal strategy for co-managing sleep symptoms. Recent evidence has  
189 also demonstrated a significant association between psoriatic arthritis and sleep disorders,  
190 particularly OSA and insomnia. [55-58] Although etanercept was reported to improve  
191 insomnia symptoms in patients with psoriatic arthritis, treatment with adalimumab did not  
192 show a therapeutic effect on patients' OSA symptoms. [57,58] Patients with both psoriatic  
193 arthritis and OSA who are to undergo hand surgery should be managed according to the  
194 OSA principles discussed earlier.

195

196

197 **Additional Management Considerations**

198 Given the potential adverse effects associated with sedatives and opioid pain medication,  
199 alternative treatment modalities for concomitant sleep disturbance and acute  
200 postoperative pain warrant further discussion. Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA)  
201 analogues gabapentin and pregabalin may have utility for treating concomitant pain and  
202 sleep symptoms, either as primary therapeutic or adjuvant agents. [59,60] Gabapentin has  
203 previously been shown as an effective treatment for both pain and sleep disturbance in CTS  
204 patients, [61] although this finding has been both supported and refuted in more recent  
205 studies. [62,63] Pregabalin shows promise in the concomitant treatment of sleep and pain  
206 symptoms, albeit in patients with fibromyalgia, for which it is FDA-approved. [64,65] While  
207 neither medication is currently FDA-approved for neuropathic pain associated specifically  
208 with conditions of the upper extremity, further investigation to that end could be  
209 worthwhile. [59]

210



211 Another promising agent for use in hand surgery is exogenous melatonin. Although its  
212 sleep-promoting characteristics are widely-reported, melatonin possesses numerous  
213 additional benefits which suggest an ideal role as a therapeutic agent in hand surgery. [66]  
214 In vitro studies on chondrocytes demonstrate that melatonin is chondrogenic and  
215 promotes matrix synthesis, and can also serve as a rescue agent for chondrocytes that are  
216 exposed to damaging pro-inflammatory or cytotoxic factors. [67-69] In an animal model of  
217 median nerve injury, sleep deprivation made rats more vulnerable to nerve injury-induced  
218 neuropathic pain, while melatonin reversed nerve injury-induced hypersensitivity. [70] In  
219 the lone clinical study evaluating its efficacy in hand surgery, melatonin was found to  
220 improve tourniquet tolerance while decreasing opioid requirement in patients receiving  
221 regional anesthesia intravenously. [71] Given this therapeutic potential and limited  
222 adverse effect profile, use of melatonin in hand surgery certainly warrants ongoing trial  
223 and further investigation.

224

225

## 226 **Current Limitations and Future Directions**

227 Due to the complex interplay of sleep with pain, psychiatric disorders, social factors, and  
228 other associated conditions, the evaluation of sleep disorders in the hand surgery patient is  
229 rarely straightforward. In a recent study by Peters and colleagues, the authors attempted  
230 to determine a relationship between sleep disturbance and upper-extremity disability, and  
231 found that psychological factors such as ineffective coping strategies were more likely to  
232 predict arm disability than sleep symptoms. [72] The authors discussed the possibility that  
233 sleep disturbance was also the product of these psychological factors, suggesting a  
234 bidirectional relationship. Their study exemplifies the challenging nature inherent to  
235 determining underlying pathology and causal relationships regarding sleep disturbances.  
236 This is echoed by Shulman et al, who found that sleep disturbance following distal radius  
237 fracture at long-term follow-up was more dependent on mental health than on functional  
238 status. [73]

239

240 A second limitation of the current evidence regarding sleep disorders in hand surgery is  
241 with respect to the heterogeneity of the patient populations studied; a shortcoming fully

242 acknowledged by Peters and colleagues. [72] In their study fractures, soft-tissue injuries,  
243 and degenerative conditions were all treated as equivalent upper extremity disabilities.  
244 Furthermore, CTS and cubital tunnel syndrome were lumped together although there is no  
245 current literature that describes sleep disorders in patients with cubital tunnel syndrome.  
246 Similarly, in their study of melatonin's utility in improving tourniquet tolerance and  
247 decreasing opioid requirements, Mowafi and Ismail did not stratify or match patients based  
248 on condition or procedure. [71] Future studies using larger, more homogenous patient  
249 cohorts, would be critical to fully understanding the relationships between sleep disorders  
250 and hand pathologies, and developing precise and effective regimens to treat coexisting  
251 sleep and hand disease.

252

253

254

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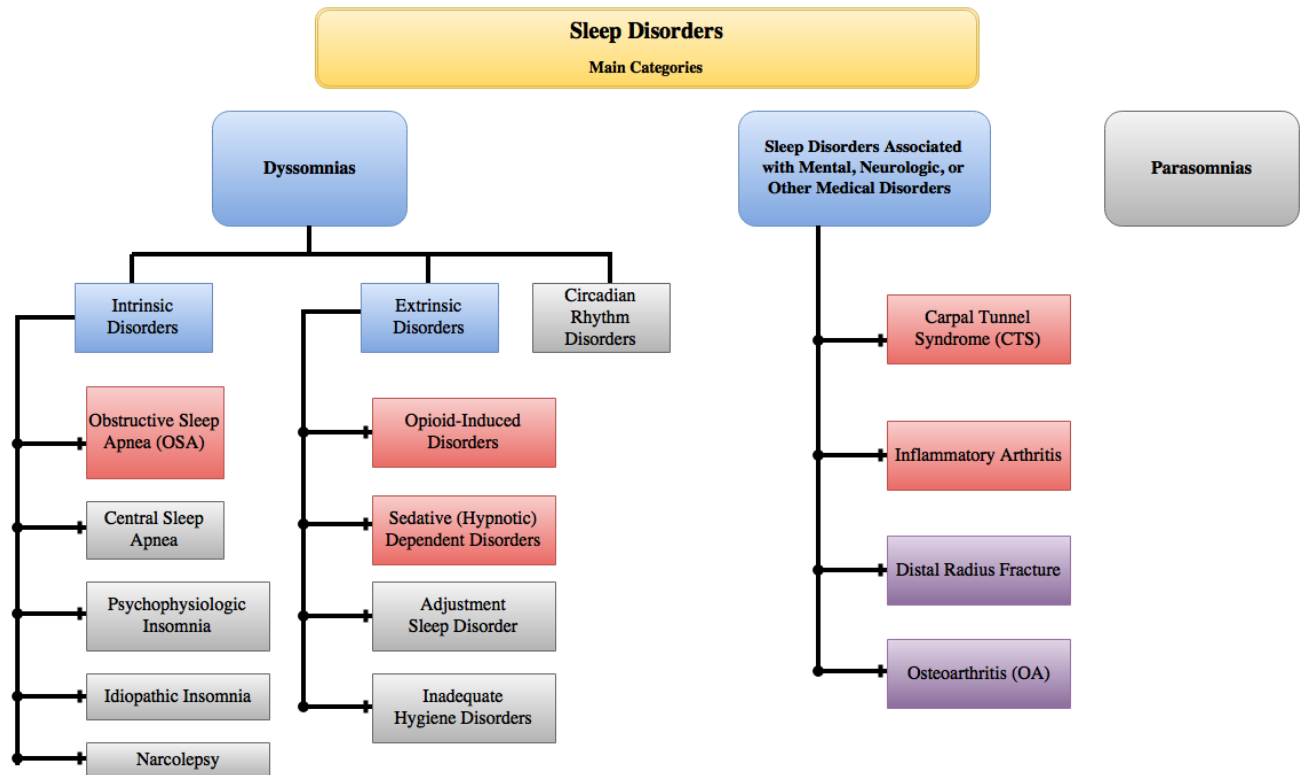


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521 **Figure 1.** Flow chart outlining the key types of sleep disorders relative to hand surgery in  
 522 the context of a broader overview of all sleep disorder categories. The first level represents  
 523 the three main categories of sleep disorders. Note that boxes in grey are not relevant to this  
 524 discussion, those in red highlight the key types of sleep disorders known to be related to  
 525 hand surgery patients, and those in purple represent conditions that are likely to be  
 526 associated with sleep disorders based on current evidence.



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**Table 1.** STOP-BANG Questionnaire to assess for risk of Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). The first section (STOP) consists of four history or symptom-related questions for the patient to answer, while the second section (BANG) consists of four items that may be objectively measured by the clinician. Answers of “Yes” to any question or measure results in a point, while “No” does not result in a point. Patients with total scores of 0-2, 3-4 and 5-8 points are considered low, intermediate, and high risk of having OSA, respectively.

Question or Variable	YES	NO
<b>STOP</b>		
Do you <b>SNORE</b> loudly (louder than talking or loud enough to be heard through closed doors)?	1	0
Do you often feel <b>TIRED</b> , fatigued, or sleepy during daytime?	1	0
Has anyone <b>OBSERVED</b> you stop breathing during your sleep?	1	0
Do you have or are you being treated for high blood <b>PRESSURE</b> ?	1	0
<b>BANG</b>		
<b>BMI</b> more than 35kg/m <sup>2</sup> ?	1	0
<b>AGE</b> over 50 years old?	1	0
<b>NECK</b> circumference > 16 inches (40cm)?	1	0
<b>GENDER:</b> Male?	1	0

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