

Help for insomniacs

Growing up, the last problem I'd ever imagine I'd have to face in my later years was insomnia.

Frankly, as a kid who played street softball and enjoyed life to the fullest as a teenager, I could probably fall asleep standing up if the bed wasn't in the room. There's also no doubt in my mind that mascara often held my eyelids open in high school world history class, when I couldn't have cared less about which king was paired with which queen.

After the babies came, I was sleep-deprived for a couple of months every four or five years, but rebounded when the kids realized Mom was asleep by 8 p.m. and it was the least they could do to help her out by settling down for the night.

So, who would have thought that I'd struggle in later years with sleep, something that came so natural for about 60 years? Apparently I'm not alone, since according to www.sleepeducation.org, 60 million Americans suffer from some sort of insomnia.

Chronic insomnia can have a negative impact on one's health: fatigue, inability to focus or concentrate, poor memory, mood disturbance, daytime sleepiness, low motivation or energy, and increased errors or accidents.

One study estimated that an employee with insomnia loses about eight days of work performance each year, so for the entire U.S. workforce, this adds up to an estimated \$63 billion in lost work performance due to insomnia annually.

There are sleep centers that can treat chronic insomnia, and I've collected some tips such as keeping the bedroom cool, cutting out the old 1940s DVDs, no late-night eating, and keeping the room as dark as possible.

However, there's something else that I discovered thanks to an online article written by Rina Raphael that introduced me to Somnox's sleep robot.

Yes, you read that correctly — it's a robot, soft and cuddly like the Teddy Ruxpin for those of you who remember the adorable bear.

According to its website, www.somnox.nl, the Netherlands has developed the product and the football-sized, peanut-shaped purposely to mimic a fetus, robot is soft to touch and murmurs with a slowed breathing rhythm to lull users to sleep. It comes with integrated audio with celestial sounds and white noise (no Bob Dylan twang here). Because one's breathing naturally adjusts to another breathing pattern, it's able to slow the user's breathing, which makes one relax and fall asleep.

Additionally, Somnox can function as an external point to focus the user's thoughts on clearing his or her head of un-

wanted thoughts and stress.

I have to admit I was sold until



Peg DeMarco

I read the part about its ability to slow down the user's breathing. Clearing my head of unwanted thoughts and stress seemed OK, but Somnox slowing down my breathing left me uncomfortable. My

apprehension comes from all those 1950's sci-fi movies where robots malfunction.

The Q&A was interesting. In response to the question, "Is it washable," which might be the last question I'd ask, the website's response was: "Yes, it can be easily washed. The sleeve of Somnox the sleep robot can be taken off to be washed in the washing machine at a temperature of 60 degrees Celsius."

Another question, "What about my partner?" Somnox's response was: "You should perceive Somnox as an addition to the family, like a baby lying in between (that doesn't cry or burp). And hey, why not have a Somnox for the both of you? Spooning together is so much fun."

Good marketing on that response — two Somnoxes are better than one.

Availability? According to the website, if you pre-ordered Somnox during the Kickstarter campaign, your Somnox will be delivered in the summer of 2018. If you pre-order one now on Indiegogo, estimated delivery is September.

Pricing? Somnox is under development and not available on the market. At the moment, it is negotiating with manufacturers. The estimated retail price will be around 589 euros — and I think that's about \$700.

According to Rina's article, Somnox (they do need to change the name to something cute) will not only obediently snuggle with you until you drift off to sleep, when you need your space, simply toss it aside with no hurt feelings to placate. At any point, you can control the robot's body, for example, breathing too strong, voice too loud. Adjustments can be made with a simple dial. And Rina points out: It doesn't snore.

Think this invention is just too way out there to catch on? Investors don't. The product's initial Kickstarter pre-order campaign last month raised \$240,000 with the help of over 500 backers in just four weeks.

Even more food for thought is that the global sleep-aids market is estimated to reach \$76.7 billion by 2019. That's a lot of ZZZs.

Peg DeMarco is a Morganton resident who writes a weekly features column for The News Herald. Contact her at pegdemarco@earthlink.net.

Morganton News Herald —
Sunday, 1.14.18