PREFACE

Preface

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Why do people sleep? Is sleep an unmotivated and passive function required only when people are tired? The answer is 'No'. Sleep plays a more positive and active role in our lives and is considered to help us work efficiently the next day by reconstructing and maintaining the cranial nerve circuits. Furthermore, it is considered that people sleep at night because they are programmed to do so. Therefore, sleep is a crucial physiological function for our daily survival and activities.

However, in today's 24-h round-the-clock society, number of people suffering from sleep disorders owing to insufficient sleep or those who fall asleep because of noise, overwork and their work shifts is increasing. Particularly, in Asia, where the population is very large, number of people with sleep disorders is rapidly increasing. According to a global consensus comprising Asian countries, the sleeping duration in South Korea and Japan is the shortest; this duration is shorter by 30–60 min to that in western countries. In addition, the rate of short sleepers, who sleep

for only 6 h or less per day, is higher in Japan (41 %) and South Korea (38 %), whereas it is lower in the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan (approximately 20 %). The rate is even lower in China, Australia and New Zealand (≤ 10 %), indicating that there is a difference in the sleeping duration between countries.

Recent studies have revealed that lack of sleep can cause serious damages to physical and mental health, including lifestyle-related diseases. It has been reported that, in addition to insomnia the prevalence rate of depression, heart diseases and prostate and breast cancers is higher among people working in shifts.

For this supplement, we requested sleep researchers in Asia to provide us with information on sleep-related problems, sleep-related education as well as the social efforts required for maintaining human health in their respective countries. We hope that this supplement helps people to cope with sleep disorders in Asia as well as worldwide.

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