Sleep may slow maturation

Most people apparently secrete more of the substance that retards sexual development when they are asleep than when they are awake, according to MIT researchers.

Darkness, food, or assumptions of the reclining position are other possible causal sites for the increased production of melatonin, researchers said, en article published in the Jan. 17 issue of Science magazine.

Melatonin, according to Prof. Richard J. Wurtman and re-

search associate Harry J. Lynch of the Department of Nutrition and Food Science, is secreted by the pineal gland in larger amounts from 11 pm to 7 am than at any other time.

Lynch’s breakthrough was development of a technique to measure very small amounts of melatonin found in urine samples. Previously, a day’s urine was needed for testing. The new method allows examination over shorter periods. All six healthy adults tested in his experiment showed more of the substance in samples taken during sleeping periods.

Melatonin’s role in sexual maturation seems to involve suppression of sexual organ development. Lynch’s new technique may be used to determine whether a fall in melatonin secretion actually may be a factor in causing puberty.

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