

8 hours -- or else

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Americans are sleeping less than ever, according to a new National Sleep Foundation poll. Some people are losing sleep because of the economy. Some are staying up too late and getting up too early. Some have disorders such as sleep apnea. And others can't sleep because their partner snores. But the danger is the same for everybody, says Mark Opp, a professor at the University of Michigan and the senior writer of a study about sleep in this month's *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*.

"We are chronically sleeping less and we are killing ourselves," Opp said.

"For years, your mom said if you don't get enough [sleep](#), you are going to get sick. Now, we have pretty compelling evidence that that is indeed the case."

Did you get a flu shot this year? Did it work? Studies at the University of Chicago and the University of Lubek in Germany show that even short periods of sleep loss play a role in vaccination success. If you miss a night of sleep, it could affect your ability to respond to a vaccination for 30 days.

Opp explained: "You are a shift worker, you've been up all night, you are working in the hospital ... and it's flu season. ... You stop to get your flu shot on the way home from work. OK, you might be immune-suppressed because of the lack of sleep, and the [vaccine](#) might not be as effective."

MOST OF US FALL SHORT

Just 28 percent of Americans get eight hours of sleep on a regular basis -- down from 38 percent in 2001, according to the National Sleep Foundation report. And 2 in 10 sleep less than six hours a night.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health estimates that some 70 million Americans suffer from a chronic sleep disorder or intermittent sleep problem.

"We are staying up later," Opp said. "We are working longer hours. We have to commute longer to work. We ... sleep less than what the biologic need is. It's becoming more and more apparent, as a part of very large studies, that short sleep has negative health consequences."

How much sleep should you get every night?

"There is pretty compelling evidence that the biologic need is more than 8 hours," Opp said.

Sleep loss is associated with increased obesity and diabetes.

The risk of a fatal heart attack increases 45 percent in those who chronically sleep five hours per night or less.

According to the National Sleep Foundation poll:

- More than one-half of adults (54 percent) have driven when drowsy at least once in the past year. Nearly one-third of drivers (28 percent) say that they have nodded off or fallen asleep while driving a vehicle.
- 27 percent had disturbed sleep in the past month because they're worried about money.

Kim Kania, a 40-year-old mortgage broker from Southfield, Mich., with

three children, says it's impossible to get a good night's sleep. She's convinced that restful nights aren't likely until her children grow up and leave. She goes to bed at 11 p.m., but she doesn't sleep soundly.

"I'm always tossing and turning, hearing all the creaks in the house," Kania said. She gets up at 5:15 a.m. to get one daughter, Jourdan, 16, up for school. She tries to go back to sleep for an hour or so until her other daughter, Jazmine, 12, has to get up for school. "It's not good sleep," Kania said. "It always makes me feel tired. I feel myself lagging in the middle of the day."

SNOORRRKKKK

Snoring affects approximately 90 million American adults. If you are overweight, you have a higher chance of snoring.

TIPS FOR HEALTHY SLEEP

1. Keep a regular bedtime and wake-up schedule, including weekends.
2. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine, such as soaking in a hot bath or hot tub and then reading a book or listening to soothing music.
3. Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool.
4. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows.
5. Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.

6. Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before your regular bedtime.
7. Exercise regularly. Late afternoon exercise is the perfect way to help you fall asleep at night.
8. Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol close to bedtime.

The National Sleep Foundation

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