

Study shows that sleep disturbances improve after retirement

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A study in the Nov.1 issue of the journal *Sleep* shows that retirement is followed by a sharp decrease in the prevalence of sleep disturbances. Findings suggest that this general improvement in sleep is likely to result from the removal of work-related demands and stress rather than from actual health benefits of retirement.

Results show that the odds of having disturbed sleep in the seven years after [retirement](#) were 26 percent lower (adjusted odds ratio of 0.74) than in the seven years before retiring. Sleep disturbance prevalence rates among 14,714 participants fell from 24.2 percent in the last year before retirement to 17.8 percent in the first year after retiring. The greatest reduction in sleep disturbances was reported by participants with depression or mental fatigue prior to retirement. The postretirement improvement in sleep also was more pronounced in men, management-level workers, employees who reported high psychological job demands, and people who occasionally or consistently worked night shifts.

Lead author Jussi Vahtera, professor in the department of public health at the University of Turku in Finland, noted that the participants enjoyed employment benefits rarely seen today, including guaranteed job stability, a statutory retirement age between 55 and 60 years, and a company-paid pension that was 80 percent of their salary.

"We believe these findings are largely applicable in situations where financial incentives not to retire are relatively weak," said Vahtera. "In countries and positions where there is no proper pension level to

guarantee [financial security](#) beyond working age, however, retirement may be followed by severe stress disturbing sleep even more than before retirement."

The study involved employees from the French national gas and electricity company, Electricité de France-Gaz de France, who retired between 1990 and 2006 at a mean age of 55 years. The study includes data from 11,581 male and 3,133 female workers who reported sleep disturbances at least once before and once after the year of retirement. Thirty-five percent of participants had worked night shifts, and 17 percent reported having depression.

Annual survey measurements ranging from seven years before to seven years after retirement (with a mean of 12 measurements) were collected throughout the study period. Participants completed questionnaires concerning health, lifestyle, individual, familial, social and occupational factors. The presence of sleep disturbances was indicated by an affirmative response to a single question from a systematic checklist of more than 50 medical conditions experienced during the previous 12 months. Information concerning occupational and health data also was collected from the company.

Results also show that there is a slowly increasing prevalence of sleep disturbances with increasing age, which can be observed both before and after retirement. From the first to the seventh year after retirement, the prevalence of sleep disturbances increased from 17.8 percent to 19.7 percent but remained significantly lower than at any time point prior to retirement.

The only exception to the general improvement in sleep after retirement was related to the four percent of participants whose retirement was based on health reasons. People who retired early because of a long-standing illness or disability had a 46 percent increased risk of [sleep](#)

[disturbances](#) (adjusted odds ratio of 1.46) after retiring.

The authors conclude that in the present time when people are expected to live many years beyond the traditional age of retirement, consideration should be given to the restructuring of working life to enable older workers to remain economically active without compromising their future health.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine ([news](#) : [web](#))

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