

Sleepy connected Americans

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The 2011 Sleep in America poll released today by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) finds pervasive use of communications technology in the hour before bed. It also finds that a significant number of Americans aren't getting the sleep they say they need and are searching for ways to cope.

Many Americans report dissatisfaction with their sleep during the week.

The poll found that 43% of Americans between the ages of 13 and 64 say they rarely or never get a good night's sleep on weeknights. More than half (60%) say that they experience a sleep problem every night or almost every night (i.e., snoring, waking in the night, waking up too early, or feeling un-refreshed when they get up in the morning.)

About two-thirds (63%) of Americans say their sleep needs are not being met during the week. Most say they need about seven and a half hours of sleep to feel their best, but report getting about six hours and 55 minutes of sleep on average weeknights. About 15% of adults between 19 and 64 and 7% of 13-18 year olds say they sleep less than six hours on weeknights.

"This poll explores the association between Americans' use of communication technologies and sleep habits," says David Cloud, CEO of the National Sleep Foundation. "While these technologies are commonplace, it is clear that we have a lot more to learn about the appropriate use and design of this technology to complement good sleep habits."

Communications technology use before sleep is pervasive.

Americans report very active technology use in the hour before trying to sleep. Almost everyone surveyed, 95%, uses some type of electronics like a television, computer, video game or cell phone at least a few nights a week within the hour before bed. However, [baby boomers](#) (46-64 year olds), generation X'ers (30-45 year olds), generation Y'ers (19-29 year olds) and generation Z'ers (13-18 year olds) report very different technology preferences.

About two-thirds of baby boomers (67%) and generation X'ers (63%) and half of generation Z'ers (50%) and generation Y'ers (49%) watch television every night or almost every night within the hour before going to sleep.

"Artificial light exposure between dusk and the time we go to bed at night suppresses release of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, enhances alertness and shifts circadian rhythms to a later hour—making it more difficult to fall asleep," says Charles Czeisler, PhD, MD, Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital. "This study reveals that light-emitting screens are in heavy use within the pivotal hour before sleep. Invasion of such alerting technologies into the bedroom may contribute to the high proportion of respondents who reported that they routinely get less sleep than they need."

Computer or laptop use is also common. Roughly six in ten (61%) say they use their laptops or computers at least a few nights a week within the hour before bed. More than half of generation Z'ers (55%) and slightly less of generation Y'ers (47%) say they surf the Internet every night or almost every night within the hour before sleep.

"My research compares how technologies that are 'passively received' such as TVs and music versus those with 'interactive' properties like

video games, cell phones and the Internet may affect the brain differently," says Michael Gradisar, PhD, Flinders University (Australia). "The hypothesis is that the latter devices are more alerting and disrupt the sleep-onset process. If you feel that these activities are alerting or causing you anxiety, try doing something more 'passive' to help you wind down before bed."

Generation Z'ers (36%) and generation Y'ers (28%) are about twice as likely as generation X'ers (15%) and baby boomers (12%) to say they play a video game within the hour before bedtime at least a few times a week. More than one in ten (14%) of generation Z'ers say they do so every night or almost every night before going to sleep.

"Over the last 50 years, we've seen how television viewing has grown to be a near constant before bed, and now we are seeing new information technologies such as laptops, cell phones, video games and music devices rapidly gaining the same status," says Lauren Hale, PhD, Stony Brook University Medical Center. "The higher use of these potentially more sleep-disruptive technologies among younger generations may have serious consequences for physical health, cognitive development and other measures of wellbeing."

Cell phone use, specifically texting and talking on the phone, shows a significant age gap. More than half of generation Z'ers (56%) and nearly half of generation Y'ers (42%) say they send, read or receive text messages every night or almost every night in the hour before bed compared to 15% of generation X'ers and 5% of baby boomers.

Cell phones were sometimes a sleep disturbance. About one in ten of generation Z'ers (9%) say that they are awakened after they go to bed every night or almost every night by a phone call, text message or email. About one in five of generation Y'ers (20%) and generation Z'ers (18%) say this happens at least a few nights a week.

"Unfortunately cell phones and computers, which make our lives more productive and enjoyable, may also be abused to the point that they contribute to getting less sleep at night leaving millions of Americans functioning poorly the next day," says Russell Rosenberg, PhD, Vice Chairman of the National Sleep Foundation.

Baby boomers are less sleepy than generations Y and Z.

Generation Z'ers and generation Y'ers report more sleepiness than generation X'ers and baby boomers, with the 13-18 year olds being the sleepiest of all. Roughly one in five of generation Z'ers (22%) and generation Y'ers (16%) rate as "sleepy" using a standard clinical assessment tool (included in the poll) compared to about one in ten generation X'ers (11%) and baby boomers (9%).

Generation Z'ers report sleeping an average of 7 hours and 26 minutes on weeknights, about an hour and 45 minutes less than the 9 hours and 15 minute recommended by experts. More than half of 13-18 year olds (54%) say they wake up between 5:00 am and 6:30 am on weekdays—compared to 45% of generation X'ers and baby boomers and 24% of generation Y'ers.

"As children develop into their teenage years, their bodies are biologically predisposed towards later bedtimes," says Amy Wolfson, PhD, an expert on adolescent sleep. "If they are required to get up before 6:30 to go to school, it's impossible for teens to get the amount of sleep they need."

Coping with sleepiness through caffeine and naps.

Americans are coping with sleepiness by drinking caffeine and taking regular naps. The average person on a weekday drinks about three 12 ounce caffeinated beverages, with little difference between age groups.

Napping is common in all age groups, but the two youngest groups reported slightly more napping during the week. More than half of generation Z'ers (53%) and generation Y'ers (52%) say they take at least one nap during the work week/school week compared to about four in ten generation X'ers (38%) and baby boomers (41%).

For the more than a quarter who say their schedules do not allow for adequate sleep, when asked to evaluate the day after getting inadequate sleep, more than eight in ten (85%) said that it affects their mood; almost three-quarters (72%) said it affects their family life or home responsibilities, and about two-thirds (68%) said it affects their social life.

For those who are employed and report not getting adequate sleep, about three quarters (74%) of those over 30 said that sleepiness affects their work. About two-thirds of adults (61%) said that their intimate or sexual relations were affected by sleepiness (13-18 year olds were not asked this question).

Sleepiness also played a factor in safe driving practices. Half of generation Y'ers (50%) say they drove while drowsy at least once in the past month. More than a third of generation X'ers (40%) and approximately a third of generation Z'ers (30%) and baby boomers (28%) also say so. A staggering number, about one in ten, of generation X'ers (12%), generation Y'ers (12%) and generation Z'ers (8%) say they drive drowsy once or twice a week.

"If you're having problems sleeping at night, or if you're feeling too sleepy the next day, take a look at your bedtime habits," says Allison Harvey, PhD, behavioral sleep expert at UC Berkeley. "Create a relaxing wind-down routine and turn down the lights. Make your bedroom a sanctuary from the worries of your day."

Healthy Sleep Advice

If you are having problems sleeping, the National Sleep Foundation suggests the following to improve your sleep:

- Set and stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same times each day.
- Expose yourself to bright light in the morning and avoid it at night. Exposure to bright morning light energizes us and prepares us for a productive day. Alternatively, dim your lights when it's close to bedtime.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise in the morning can help you get the light exposure you need to set your biological clock. Avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime if you are having problems sleeping.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine. Allow enough time to wind down and relax before going to bed.
- Create a cool, comfortable sleeping environment that is free of distractions. If you're finding that entertainment or work-related communications are creating anxiety, remove these distractions from your bedroom.
- Treat your bed as your sanctuary from the stresses of the day. If you find yourself still lying awake after 20 minutes or so, get up and do something relaxing in dim light until you are sleepy.
- Keep a "worry book" next to your bed. If you wake up because of worries, write them down with an action plan, and forget

about them until morning.

- Avoid caffeinated beverages, chocolate and tobacco at night.
- Avoid large meals and beverages right before bedtime.
- No nightcaps. Drinking alcohol before bed can rob you of deep sleep and can cause you to wake up too early.
- Avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep. If you have trouble sleeping, ask your doctor or pharmacist if your medications might be contributing to your [sleep](#) problem.
- No late-afternoon or evening naps, unless you work nights. If you must nap, keep it under 45 minutes and before 3:00 pm.

More information: sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2011-03-07%20Sleepy%20Americans.pdf

Provided by National Sleep Foundation

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