

Study: Sleep gets better with age, not worse

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Aging does not appear to be a factor in poor sleep, a new survey of more than 150,000 Americans shows. In fact, subjective sleep quality seems to improve over a lifetime, with the fewest complaints coming from people in their 80s.

"This flies in the face of [popular belief](#)," said Michael Grandner, PhD, lead author of the study. "These results force us to re-think what we know about sleep in older people – men and women."

The study, appearing in the March edition of the journal *Sleep*, examined rates of sleep disturbance and daytime fatigue reported by 155,877 adults participating in a randomized telephone survey. Respondents were asked about sleep disturbances and daytime tiredness. The survey also asked about race, income, education, depressed mood, general health and time of last medical checkup. All responses were weighted so that they matched U.S. Census data.

Health problems and depression were associated with poor sleep, and women reported more sleep disturbances and tiredness than men. But except for an uptick in sleep problems during middle age – more pronounced in women than men – sleep quality improved consistently over a lifetime. Or at least that's how people reported their sleep.

"Even if sleep among older Americans is actually worse than in younger adults, feelings about it still improve with age," said Grandner, Research Associate at the Center for Sleep and Circadian Neurobiology at the Perlman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. "Once

you factor out things like illness and depression, older people should be reporting better sleep. If they're not, they need to talk to their doctor. They shouldn't just ignore it."

Grandner said the study's original intent was to confirm that increased sleep problems are associated with aging, using the largest and most representative sample ever to address this issue. Instead, the results challenge the conventional wisdom that difficulty sleeping is perceived more by older adults, and challenge the general clinical practice of ignoring [sleep](#) complaints from older adults as a normal part of aging.

More information: "Age and Sleep Disturbances Among American Men And Women: Data From the U.S. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System," in journal *Sleep*.

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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