

Many seniors' sleep habits are similar to those of young adults, study suggests

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More than half of all retired people aged 65 and over report sleeping at least 7.5 hours per night, and between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7:30 a.m., contrary to commonly held assumptions that most elderly go to bed early and have trouble sleeping through the night, according to a study by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh's Sleep and Chronobiology Center (SCC) and University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR).

This new study, supported by a grant from the National Institute on Aging, was conducted over five years and is among the first to provide empirical self-report data on the timing, quality and duration of [sleep](#), as well as levels of [daytime sleepiness](#) in a large sample of retired older adults.

"Our findings suggest that in matters regarding sleep and sleepiness, as in many other aspects of life, most [seniors](#) today are doing better than is generally thought," said Timothy H. Monk, Ph.D., D.Sc., the study's lead author and professor of psychiatry at UPMC's Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. "The stereotype of most seniors going to bed at 8 p.m., sleeping very lightly and being unduly sleepy during the day may be quite inaccurate, suggesting that 60 really is the new 40."

Researchers based the study, published in the journal *Healthy Aging and Clinical Care in the Elderly*, on extensive telephone interviews with nearly 1,200 retired seniors in western Pennsylvania. About 25 percent said they slept less than 6.7 hours per night and experienced problems

with nocturnal sleep and daytime sleepiness. The remaining 75 percent reported sleeping more than 6.75 hours, on average.

According to the authors, past studies have highlighted the chronic sleep disruption often experienced by older adults, but few of these prior reviews were supported by strong [empirical data](#) and many concentrated on illness, thereby furthering stereotypical beliefs that older adults sleep for shorter periods of time, go to bed and rise very early, and experience daytime sleepiness.

Additional observations include:

- Age-related sleep issues in seniors may depend largely on the health of the individual, rather than on the age of that individual
- Most seniors do not have reliably earlier bedtimes than younger adults and report obtaining at least 7.5 hours of sleep per night
- Daytime sleepiness in seniors often can be associated with medications, illnesses and poor nocturnal sleep, and may not be necessarily associated with age

"The take-away for [older adults](#) is that if you can keep yourself healthy and avoid or treat age-related diseases and disorders, then you'll be able to sleep like a younger adult," added Dr. Monk. "Although some seniors do have huge sleep problems which need to be understood and treated, the majority of seniors are not reporting significant problems with either nocturnal sleep or daytime sleepiness."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences

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