

First ever great British bedtime report launched

March 1 2013

The number of Britons getting just five to six hours sleep a night has risen dramatically in the past three years, with 40% not getting the NHS recommended six to nine hours.

According to a major new report being published today (March 1) by The Sleep Council:

- A third of the population (33%) now get by on five to six hours sleep a night compared to 27% in 2010. And the majority of people (70%) sleep for seven hours or less.
- Almost half of [Britons](#) say that stress or worry keeps them awake at night.
- As many as 7.9 million have used alcohol to help them get to sleep at night while 6.8 million self-medicate with over-the-counter tonics.
- High earners (£65 - £75,000) get the best sleep of all.

The findings – being announced at the start of National Bed Month (March) - come from The Sleep Council's biggest ever research project. Some 5000 people were surveyed in January 2013 to provide an overview of British sleeping habits. The results are published in an in-depth report – The Great British Bedtime Report - which is being sent to leading government health officials.

It found the average Briton goes to bed at 11.15pm and gets just six

hours and 35 minutes sleep per night.

Said Jessica Alexander of The Sleep Council: "Sleeping well is as crucial to our health and wellbeing as eating a healthy diet or exercising regularly. But while we're frequently exposed to government campaigns that encourage us to eat 'Five a Day', 'Live Well' or 'Change4Life', the nation's sleeping habits are largely ignored. We want to see sleep moved up the political agenda and a public information campaign launched to encourage people to understand the importance of good sleep and how to achieve it."

The Sleep Council's Great British Bedtime report is intended to provide a full audit into the nation's sleeping habits and will be repeated on a regular basis in order to monitor any changes.

One significant change – benchmarked against a Sleep Council survey in 2010 – shows a worrying increase in the number of people sleeping just five to six hours with 7% more people now getting by on this a night.

Although current NHS guidelines indicate that we don't necessarily need eight hours sleep, experts believe that most adults require somewhere between six and nine hours in order to feel refreshed and to function well both mentally and physically.

"The rise in the number of people getting less than six hours sleep is certainly a concern – research would suggest that mental and physical problems become more pronounced in those sleeping for less than six hours," said Jessica Alexander.

"Just one bad night's sleep affects our mood, concentration and alertness while long-term sleep deprivation has far more serious consequences: it's been linked to a number of serious health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke."

With Britain in the grip of a serious economic downturn, The Sleep Council's research found that many of us are too anxious to sleep: almost half of us now say that stress or worry keeps them awake at night (47%) rising to 54% of women (compared to 40% of men) and 57% of singles.

The Great British Bedtime Report says 22% of Britons sleep poorly most nights and that men appear to enjoy better quality sleep than women (30% sleep very well, compared to 22% of women).

High earners get the best sleep of all, while those on low incomes sleep the worst. More than a third (34%) of those earning £65,000 - £75,000 sleep very well, while 10% of those earning less than £15,000 sleep very poorly. 8% of those who don't work also sleep very poorly most nights.

38% of respondents believe that changing their bed time and wake up time would improve their sleep while 17% have taken medication and 14% have tried over the counter remedies in an attempt to relieve the problem. Drinking alcohol (16%) is another worryingly common method people use to help them drop off. As a percentage of the adult population, that equates to 7.9 million turning to alcohol to help them sleep while 6.8 million self-medicate with over-the-counter tonics.

People who exercise five to six times per week are the least likely to take medication (12% compared to a national average of 17%) which suggests this could be the optimal amount of exercise needed to improve sleep.

The most popular time to go to bed is between 10pm –11pm. Just over a third (34%) of us go to bed at this time but there are a lot of night owls about as nearly half (48%) go to bed later than this. Women tend to go to bed earlier than men: 11% go to bed at 9pm –10pm (compared to 8% of men) and 37% go to bed at 10pm –11pm (compared to 30% of men).

Sleeping together remains a key aspect of British relationships across all age groups: more than three-quarters of Britons in a relationship or married (78%) share their bed with just 8% saying they never do and 14% saying that they do sometimes. Older couples are least likely to share: 13% of those aged 55+ sleep alone.

The most popular way to wind down at the end of the day is to go to bed with a book: more than four in 10 (41%) of people do this. Watching television is also popular (38%). The tech-savvy generation (16-24-year-olds) is most likely to use a laptop or tablet (22%) and check social media (17%) before they go to sleep.

While the importance of the bedroom environment (heat, light, noise) was underestimated, the value of a good bed is recognised, with more than one in five respondents saying they could improve their sleep simply by buying a new bed. And seven out of 10 (72%) follow Sleep Council advice and have had their bed for less than seven years.

The average people spend on a new bed is £583.05 and the divan is the most widely bought type with 63% of us sleeping on one. King size beds are popular with 31% choosing this size.

Said Jessica Alexander: "What's clear is that one of the best ways to improve sleep is simply to take more exercise. For many of us, that plus a sensible, regular bedtime and a comfortable bed, are key to sleeping well.

"Improving 'sleep hygiene' by keeping electrical devices like TVs and laptops out of the bedroom, giving ourselves time to wind down before bed and keeping our bedroom dark and quiet can also help.

"Given that more than four in 10 Britons (41%) feel positive after a

good night's [sleep](#), a third feel happy and almost a quarter (24%) feel productive, it's well worth making the effort to improve our sleeping habits."

Provided by The Sleep Council

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