

# Could restless sleep cause widespread pain in older folks?

February 13 2014

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Researchers in the U.K. report that non-restorative sleep is the strongest, independent predictor of widespread pain onset among adults over the age of 50. According to the study published in *Arthritis & Rheumatology* (formerly *Arthritis & Rheumatism*), a journal of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), anxiety, memory impairment, and poor physical health among older adults may also increase the risk of developing widespread pain.

Muscle, bone and nerve (musculoskeletal) pain is more prevalent as people age, with up to 80% of people 65 years of age and older experiencing daily pain. Widespread pain that affects multiple areas of the body—the hallmark feature of fibromyalgia—affects 15% of women and 10% of men over age 50 according to previous studies.

Led by Dr. John McBeth from the Arthritis Research UK Primary Care Centre, Keele University in Staffordshire, this newly published population-based prospective study identified factors that increase the risk of the development of widespread pain in older [adults](#). The team collected data on pain, psychological and physical health, lifestyle and demographic information from 4326 adults over the age of 50 who were free of widespread pain at the start of the study (1562 subjects reported no pain and 2764 had some pain). These participants were followed up three years later for the development of widespread pain.

Results show that at follow-up, 800 (19%) reported new widespread pain. The development of new widespread pain was greater in those with

some pain at the start of the study; 679 (25%) of those with some pain and 121 (8%) of those with no pain at the start developed new widespread pain at three year follow-up.

Analyses determined that pain status, anxiety, [physical health](#)-related quality of life, cognitive complaint and non-restorative sleep were associated with increased risk of widespread pain development, after adjusting for osteoarthritis (OA). Increasing [age](#) was associated with a decreased likelihood of the development of widespread pain.

"While OA is linked to new onset of widespread pain, our findings also found that poor sleep, cognition, and physical and psychological health may increase pain risk," concludes Dr. McBeth. "Combined interventions that treat both site-specific and widespread pain are needed for [older adults](#)."

**More information:** "Predictors of New Onset Widespread Pain in Older Adults- Results from the Prospective Population-based NorStOP Study." John McBeth, Rosie J Lacey and Ross Wilkie. *Arthritis & Rheumatology*; Published Online: February 13, 2014. [DOI: 10.1002/art.38284](#)

Provided by Wiley

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