

# Online survey reveals new epidemic of sleeplessness

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Professor Richard Wiseman

New online research, conducted to coincide with the publication of Professor Richard Wiseman's latest book *Night School*, suggests that nearly six in ten (59%) of adults in Britain - over 28 million people - are now sleep deprived and getting seven hours or less sleep each night. This

is a significant increase on the 2013 figure of thirty-nine per cent taken from a previous study.\*

Richard Wiseman, professor in the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire, commented: "This is a huge rise, and the results are extremely worrying because getting less than seven hours sleep a night is below the recommended guidelines, and is associated with a range of problems, including an increased risk of weight gain, heart attacks, diabetes and cancer."

To assess one potential cause of the sleeplessness epidemic, respondents were also asked whether they used a computer, smartphone or tablet in the two hours before going to bed.

"The [blue light](#) from these devices suppress the production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin, and so it's important to avoid them before bedtime," commented Wiseman.

Seventy-eight per cent (78%) of respondents indicated that they use such devices during this period. Among 18-24 year olds this figure increases to a remarkable ninety-one per cent (91%).

"The 2013 survey revealed that around 57% of people in the UK were using these devices, so we are seeing a significant rise in the amount of blue light before bedtime," said Wiseman.

The survey also suggested that the vast majority of people's dreams are far from sweet, with just ten per cent (10%) of respondents strongly agreeing with the statement 'I would describe my dreams as pleasant'.

Professor Wiseman noted: "The dream data revealed considerable variation across the UK, with those in London and the Southwest agreeing the most, and those in the Northwest and Midlands agreeing the

least."

Ten science-based tips have been compiled by Professor Wiseman to help the country get a better night's sleep.

10 science-based tips to a better night's sleep:

1. **Banish the blues:** Avoid using computers, smartphones or tablets in the two hours before you head to bed. The blue light stimulates your brain and prevents you feel sleepy.
2. **The list:** Make a list of all of the things that you have to do the next day or that are playing on your mind. This helps prevent you lying in bed thinking about these issues.
3. **Tire your brain:** If you are struggling to sleep, make your brain tired by thinking of an animal for each letter of the alphabet ('A' is for 'Ant', 'B' is for 'Bear').
4. **Move your bed:** You have evolved to feel safe when you can spot danger early and have time to run away, and so will feel most relaxed when your bed faces the door and is furthest from it.
5. **Reach for a banana:** Eat a banana before you head to bed. They're rich in carbohydrates, and these help relax your body and brain.
6. **Reverse psychology:** Actively trying to stay awake actually makes you feel tired, so try keeping your eyes open and focus on not falling asleep.
7. **Wear socks:** If you have bad circulation, your feet will get cold and cause sleeplessness. To avoid the problem, wear a pair of warm socks to bed.
8. **Avoid the lure of the nightcap:** Although a small amount of alcohol puts you to sleep quicker, it also gives you a more disturbed night and disrupts dreaming.
9. **The power of association:** Ensure that the same piece of soporific music is quietly playing each time you fall asleep. Over time

you'll come to associate the music with [sleep](#), and so listening to it will help you to nod off.

10. Do a jigsaw: If you lie awake for more than twenty minutes, get up and do something non-stimulating for a few minutes, such as working on a jigsaw.

## UK Dream Data

The percentage of people in each region strongly agreeing to the statement 'In general, I would describe my dreams as pleasant' was as follows:

- London: 13%
- South West: 13%
- Scotland: 12%
- Yorkshire and the Humber: 12%
- North East: 11%
- South East: 10%
- East of England: 10%
- Wales: 9%
- North West: 7%
- West Midlands: 7%
- East Midlands: 6%

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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