

# Public missing out on a night's worth of sleep every week

April 4 2016

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The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) has warned that the UK public is under-sleeping by an average of almost an hour every night – which amounts to losing an entire night's sleep over the course of a week. The report was prepared with the help of Oxford University expertise. As a result, RSPH experts are calling for the introduction of national sleep guidance time – 'a slumber number' – to help inform the public about the critical importance of sleep to health and wellbeing.

The report, '[Waking up to the health benefits of sleep](#)', co-authored by Oxford University [sleep](#) expert Professor Colin Espie, calls on the Government, employers, and individuals to do more to promote good quality sleep to protect and promote the [public's health](#) and wellbeing.

RSPH polling has also shown that the public feel getting enough sleep is the second most important activity for optimising their health and wellbeing, ahead of important health behaviours such as eating five fruit and vegetables a day, undertaking enough physical activity, and sticking to recommended alcohol guidelines. In fact, sleep was ranked second only behind not smoking. RSPH's poll of 2,000 UK adults also revealed:

- Average sleep time is 6.8 hours, below the average 7.7 hours people feel they need
- More than half (54%) have felt stressed as a result of poor sleep
- More than a third (36%) have eaten unhealthy food as a result of poor sleep
- Almost four in 10 (37%) have fallen asleep on public transport
- Around one in 20 (4%) have fallen asleep during sex

| Physical  | Mental                   | Behavioural                          | Performance                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Risk of...  | Risk of...               | Risk of...                           |                                      |
| Cancer  | Depression               | Sleepiness                           | Impaired attention and concentration |
| Cardiovascular disease and stroke                     | Psychiatric relapse      | Road traffic accidents               | Decreased memory                     |
| Disorders of the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) | Mood fluctuation         | Falls and fractures                  | Reduced multi-tasking                |
| Metabolic abnormalities                               | Delirium                 | Repeat prescribing                   | Impaired decision-making             |
| Weight gain & obesity                                 | Impulsivity              | Alcohol and drug dependency          | Reduced creativity                   |
| Reduced immunity                                      | Anger and frustration    | Increased sedative and stimulant use | Reduced communication                |
| Bodily sensations of pain                             | Higher risk of suicide   | Less likely to attend appointments   | Reduced socialisation                |
| Thermoregulatory problems                             | Anxiety and hyperarousal | Longer stay in hospital              | Less likely to be employed           |
| Vulnerable seizure threshold                          | Chronic fatigue          | Earlier admission to long-term care  | More likely to be on benefits        |

Shirley Cramer CBE, Chief Executive of RSPH, said: 'We need to wake up to the benefits of sleep - there is a wealth of evidence that lack of sleep is damaging the public's health. Poor sleep and sleep disorders impact on our ability to lead a healthy lifestyle and are associated with a range of diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart attack.

'Our research shows there is a yawning gap in how much sleep the public are getting compared to how much they need – this could be as much as one night's worth of sleep every week. Efforts to combat this shortfall could be as critical to optimising our health and wellbeing as maintaining an active lifestyle or having a healthy diet. A good starting point would be for the Government to ensure a Minister has cross-departmental

responsibility for this issue and that in turn a national sleep strategy is published which sets out guidance for the public and what more schools, employers, and healthcare professionals can do to ensure the nation sleeps better at night.'

Professor Colin Espie, Professor of Sleep Medicine at the University of Oxford, said: 'The importance of sleep for individual and societal benefit has been almost completely neglected in both policy and practice. Insomnia, the most common expression of mental disease is like a Cinderella disorder – seldom receiving proper attention, despite the fact that it is the most treatable pre-cursor to depression.

'I'm delighted to be associated with this report on the nation's sleep, and I look forward to addressing the challenges it sets with anyone in authority who will listen. There is actually a great opportunity to put contemporary sleep research findings to work for public good, and I'm sure the population at large would agree and would thank us for adding sleep to the nation's health agenda.'

Provided by University of Oxford

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