

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

April 4 2016



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

Citation: Public missing out on a night's worth of sleep every week (2016, April 4) retrieved 18 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-04-night-worth-week.html>

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