

Repaying sleep debt on holidays? Unlikely, expert says

July 12 2016



Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

Work-related stress makes many of us lose sleep, and catching up on lost

sleep is high on the agenda as the summer holidays approach. Poor sleep can't be turned into good overnight, but it pays off to try, as good sleeping habits keep us going on holiday and at work.

"People tend to work very hard before the [holidays](#), thinking that's when they'll have time to sleep. Sadly, it doesn't work that way. If you've slept poorly over a long period of time, your holidays will get spent on just recovering," says Docent Henri Tuomilehto from the University of Eastern Finland.

Last-minute corrective measures won't help much, either. Tuomilehto stresses the importance of good sleeping habits and routines as the cornerstones of good sleep.

"If you've neglected your sleep all year, you can't really expect things to suddenly change when you start your holidays. Having said that, there's no need to get anxious. There's always the next year's holidays, and now is a good time to look in the mirror and think about possible changes."

In his work as a sleep specialist at Oivauni Sleep Clinic, Tuomilehto mainly works with working-age patients. He also specialises in the sleep of professional athletes, as he works with Finnish football and ice-hockey teams, the Finnish Olympic Committee, and the Finnish Ski Sport Foundation. Furthermore, Tuomilehto is a member in the international committee preparing new treatment guidelines for [obstructive sleep apnoea](#).

"Generally speaking, people sleep less than they think they do. Sleeping time is often sacrificed to evening-time household chores, TV watching and, most importantly, using our smart devices in the bed. You think you go to sleep at a given time, but in reality, you are still browsing the internet one hour later. Nevertheless, sleep is something that shouldn't be sacrificed."

So, how to make adjustments to one's sleeping habits, and how to tell if there's a need to make them in the first place?

"A person who sleeps well is energetic. If you feel like you could be more energetic, it's a good idea to try sleeping one hour longer for a couple of weeks – that's enough to tell if there's a difference. Another important thing is to stop making excuses for your [poor sleep](#), as the majority of the contributing factors can be impacted on."

If despite all efforts you still don't sleep well, it's worthwhile to think about the possibility of a sleep disorder. In Finland, one in five people suffer from a sleep disorder, and the problem is widespread globally, too.

At the end of our holidays, we often toss and turn in the bed, anxious about having to return to work.

"It's normal for people to react to something important or exciting that's coming up. One night's bad [sleep](#) isn't important. It's the big picture that counts."

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

Citation: Repaying sleep debt on holidays? Unlikely, expert says (2016, July 12) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-07-repaying-debt-holidays-expert.html>

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