Study suggests that parental health behaviors may influence children's sleep

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A new study indicates that children's sleep duration may be influenced by parental sleep duration and confidence, which suggests that efforts to address insufficient sleep among children may require family-based interventions.

Results of a parental survey show that higher parent confidence in the

ability to help children get enough sleep was significantly associated with an increased child sleep duration of 0.67 hours per day, after controlling for potential confounders such as child age, gender, race/ethnicity, and parent education. Overall, 57 percent of parents reported feeling "very" or "extremely" confident that they could help their child get enough sleep. The study also found that child sleep duration was 0.09 hours per day longer for each 1-hour increase in parent sleep duration.

"Our study suggests that educating parents about their own sleep health and promoting increased confidence in their ability to help their children get enough sleep are potential areas of intervention to increase child sleep duration, either through formal programs or in a pediatricians office," said lead author Corinna Rea, MD, instructor in pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and attending physician at Boston Children's Hospital.

Study results are published in the Nov. 15 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*.

To promote optimal health, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that children between the ages of 6 and 12 years should sleep 9 to 12 hours per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health. Regularly sleeping fewer than the number of recommended hours is associated with attention, behavior, and learning problems, and it increases health and safety risks.The study also evaluated the relationship between child sleep duration and other parent behaviors and practices, including screen time, physical activity, and limits placed on child TV viewing. Surprisingly, after adjustment for demographic characteristics, these behaviors were not significantly associated with child sleep duration.

"Our results also may suggest that individual parent behaviors do not reflect a 'family lifestyle,' but rather that parental sleep is directly linked

to child sleep irrespective of others behaviors," explained Rea.

The study involved 790 parents with a mean age of 41 years. Their children, who were between the ages of 6 and 12 years, were participating in a randomized controlled obesity trial. Trained research assistants administered a survey to parents over the phone. About 92 percent of respondents were mothers. Average daily sleep duration was 6.9 hours for parents and 9.2 hours for children.

According to the authors, the cross-sectional design of the study did not allow for an examination of causality. However, the authors noted that there are several potential mediators for the association between parent and child sleep duration. For example, parents may influence child sleep duration by serving as role models, encouraging and supporting their child's healthy choices, or establishing a family bedtime.

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More information: "Associations of Parent Health Behaviors and Parenting Practices with Sleep Duration in Overweight and Obese Children," *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, 2016.

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