

New parents face six years of disrupted sleep

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The birth of a child has drastic short-term effects on new mothers' sleep, particularly during the first three months after birth. Researchers at the University of Warwick have also found sleep duration and satisfaction is decreased up to six years after giving birth for both parents.

A new study by researchers from the University of Warwick shows that after birth of the first child and up to 6 years after birth mothers and fathers [sleep duration](#) and sleep satisfaction do not fully recover to the levels before pregnancy.

In the paper 'Long-term effects of pregnancy and childbirth on sleep satisfaction and duration of first-time and experienced mothers and fathers', a collaboration with the German Institute for Economic Research and the West Virginia University studied sleep in 4,659 parents who had a child between 2008 and 2015.

During these years parents also reported on their sleep in yearly interviews. In the first 3 months after birth mothers slept on average 1 hour less than before pregnancy while fathers sleep duration decreased by approximately 15 minutes.

Dr. Sakari Lemola, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick comments:

"Women tend to experience more sleep disruption than men after the birth of a child reflecting that mothers are still more often in the role of the primary caregiver than fathers"

However, when the children were 4-6 years old sleep duration was still about 20 minutes shorter in mothers and 15 minutes shorter in fathers compared to their sleep [duration](#) before pregnancy. A similar time course was also observed for their satisfaction with sleep.

Sleep effects were more pronounced in first-time parents compared with experienced parents. In the first half a year after birth the sleep effects were also somewhat stronger in breastfeeding compared with bottle-feeding mothers.

Higher household income and psychosocial factors such as dual vs. single parenting did not appear to protect against these changes in sleep after childbirth.

Dr. Sakari Lemola, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick comments:

"While having children is a major source of joy for most [parents](#) it is possible that increased demands and responsibilities associated with the role as a parent lead to shorter sleep and decreased [sleep](#) quality even up to 6 years after [birth](#) of the first child."

More information: Richter, D., Krämer, M.D., Tang, N.K.Y., Montgomery-Downs, H.E., & Lemola, S. (in press/2019). Long-term effects of pregnancy and childbirth on sleep satisfaction and duration of first-time and experienced mothers and fathers. *Sleep*. doi/10.1093/sleep/zsz015/5289255

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