

Poor health more likely to be associated with shorter sleep in older Irish population

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Trinity College Dublin researchers have shown that some Irish adults are not 'getting a good night's sleep' resulting in an increased risk of negative health outcomes. The first findings on sleep duration in the older Irish population are published by The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (JAGS).

Sub-optimal sleep duration has been linked to adverse [health](#) outcomes. Previous studies have shown that both short and long sleep duration are [risk factors](#) for premature mortality, cardiovascular and chronic disease, and impairments in cognitive and mental health. This study established baseline findings of sleep duration in older Irish adults using fitted devices and self-reported records, over a one-week period. Short and long sleep duration were found to be associated with socio-demographic and health characteristics.

Key findings:

- Sleep duration increased with age.
- Adults 50 years and older sleep for an average of 7 hours and 42 minutes per night.
- Recommended sleep ranges are: 7-9 hours for adults aged 26 to 64 years, and 7-8 hours for adults aged 65 years and older.
- 70% of adults sleep within the recommended range, but 14% recorded average sleep duration shorter and 17% recorded average sleep duration longer than recommended.
- Sleep duration recordings taken during [summer months](#) were shorter than those taken in autumn and winter.
- Retired and unemployed adults and anti-depressant medication users record longer sleep periods.
- Poor health is more likely to be associated with shorter sleep compared with good health.
- Moderate or high physical activity is associated with normal sleep.

TILDA researcher and lead author Siobhan Scarlett said: "While sleep duration is not recognised as a public health concern, this research highlights an important subset of Irish adults who are not meeting the recommended guidelines for sleep duration and are at increased risk of negative health outcomes. Awareness of the impact of sub-optimal sleep

duration and factors potentially driving these patterns, particularly those which are modifiable, is important. Addressing the underlying causes of undesirable sleep patterns may help to facilitate improvements in the health and wellbeing of our older population."

Principal Investigator of TILDA, Professor Rose Anne Kenny, said: "Sleep duration is an important contributor to physical and mental health. There are a number of behaviours which if changed, can improve sleep quality and duration. These apply to all age groups but particularly mature adults, almost one third of whom experience impaired sleep duration according to our recent data. Awareness of medications which change sleep quality and [duration](#) and change in 'habits before bed' can help to regulate [sleep duration](#) and overall benefit physical and brain health."

More information: Siobhán Scarlett et al. Objective Sleep Duration in Older Adults: Results From The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.16177](#)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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