

# Optimistic people sleep better

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Optimists live longer than pessimists and have a lower risk of chronic disease—this has been scientifically validated on multiple occasions. A reason for optimists having longer and healthier lives could be that they sleep better: this is the central finding of a recent study led by Jakob Weitzer and Eva Schernhammer from the Medical University of

Vienna's Division of Epidemiology, which has now been published in the *Journal of Sleep Research*. The two sleep researchers Stefan Seidel and Gerhard Klösch (Department of Neurology, Medical University of Vienna) were also involved in this study.

By analyzing the data of a 2017 [online survey](#) about general sleep characteristics and other factors such as people's work situation and behaviors prior to going to bed, in which 1,004 Austrians participated, the MedUni Vienna epidemiologists found that the probability of suffering from [sleep disorders](#) and/or insomnia was around 70% lower among optimistic participants than it was among those who tended towards pessimism. "Other studies have shown that optimists take more [exercise](#), smoke less and eat a healthier diet. On top of that, they have better strategies for coping with problems and experience less stress in challenging situations. All these factors could contribute to better quality sleep," says Weitzer, summing up the current status of the research.

## **"Training" optimism**

The study authors point out that optimism can be cultivated by means of various exercises. One of these exercises is the so-called "Best Possible Self" method. Says Weitzer: "This involves trying to imagine an ideal and writing down how one's best possible life could look in the future. After several weeks of regular practice, it can help to increase an individual's level of optimism." This is not so much about achieving this 'ideal' but more about reflecting on it generally to help set realistic goals for an optimistic future.

However, it is not yet certain whether the increase in optimism achieved in these exercises can promote better sleep and [better health](#), Weitzer emphasizes. Should this prove to be the case (and this would have to be investigated in further studies), 'optimism training' might reduce the prevalence of sleep disorders and other health problems in the

population.

**More information:** Jakob Weitzer et al. The contribution of dispositional optimism to understanding insomnia symptomatology: Findings from a cross-sectional population study in Austria, *Journal of Sleep Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/jsr.13132](https://doi.org/10.1111/jsr.13132)

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