

# Sufficient sleep associated with life satisfaction in parents, new study finds

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New research findings from a multi-university research team that includes Danielle Symons Downs, professor of kinesiology and obstetrics and gynecology and associate director of the Social Science

Research Institute at Penn State, show that for new and established parents getting sufficient sleep plays an important role in their mental health and, in turn, life satisfaction.

The research team analyzed [sleep](#), physical activity, mental health and life satisfaction in couples. Their findings, published in the journal *Sleep Health*, indicated meeting sleep guidelines was associated with better mental health and, in turn, [life satisfaction](#) of [parents](#) of newborns. Additionally, positive mental health changes were observed in women, especially for [first-time mothers](#), but no changes were seen for men regardless of parental status.

"Given the well-known decreases in physical activity for most couples with the transition to parenthood and our findings in this study that most parents were not meeting the recommended sleep hours, targeted approaches that adapt intervention dosages to the changing physical activity and sleep needs of couples throughout the perinatal and postpartum periods may be a useful intervention strategy to improve, and ideally sustain, long-term mental health in parents," Downs explained.

For parents who cannot allot more time in their schedule for sleep, the research team recommends avoiding eating large meals and drinking caffeine close to bed time. This lets the body know that it is time to wind down.

"The study showed that [physical activity](#) had a negligible impact on mental health of parents. However, getting the recommended sleep hours was associated with better mental health for parents," said senior author Alison Divine, a lecturer at the University of Leeds. "Although it varied, most parents were below recommended sleep hours by approximately one hour. Small improvements in sleep hours could have significant impact for parents' [mental health](#). This indicates that an intervention prioritizing sleep health education for new parents could make a more

positive impact on their quality of life."

**More information:** Alison Divine et al, The influence of sleep and movement on mental health and life satisfaction during the transition to parenthood, *Sleep Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.sleh.2022.06.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2022.06.013)

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