

# Many Latinos in the US don't get enough sleep, and researchers are trying to learn why

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A good night's sleep is essential for good health, but many Latinos in the

U.S. just don't get enough of it.

To shed light on possible reasons why, researchers are studying the [sleep habits](#) of those living near the U.S.-Mexico [border](#).

"I honestly don't think we have a very good understanding of what the rates of ([sleep problems](#)) are in the Latino community," said John Ruiz, a psychology professor at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He is part of the research team studying the sleep habits of Latinos living in the Nogales, Arizona, area along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The goal of the Nogales Cardiometabolic Health and Sleep Study is to help develop "an understanding of how border contexts and [social contexts](#) impact sleep in the border region," Ruiz said. "Second, do those sleep patterns and associated cardiovascular risks vary as a function of ethnicity? Do Latinos experience those contexts different than non-Latinos, and is that helpful or harmful to their health?"

Most adults need seven to nine [hours of sleep](#) each night, but about 1 in 3 Latino adults sleep less than seven hours, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's on par with the overall U.S. population.

Insufficient sleep, insomnia and disorders such as [sleep apnea](#) have been linked to obesity, [high blood pressure](#) and diabetes—conditions that can increase the risk of heart disease.

Until about a decade ago, the sleep health of Hispanic people received little attention. But the U.S. Hispanic population grew 23% between 2010 and 2020 to more than 62 million, census data show. Now, Latino sleep research has gradually expanded, and findings suggest that they have a higher incidence of sleep deprivation—but the causes still are not well known.

In the southern Arizona county of Santa Cruz, about 1,000 adults—mostly Mexican Americans—ages 25 to 60 are participating in the sleep study. "Proximity to the border may come with more stress, and that higher stress can impact one's ability to sleep," Ruiz said.

Neighborhoods next to the border often must contend with increased noise, but residents of the county also live with fewer resources and often intense political scrutiny around border security and safety. "All those things could be particularly challenging," he said. "They can influence how well you're going to be able to get a good night's rest."

Socioeconomic status also can affect sleep, Ruiz said. About 20% of the county's residents live in poverty, census data show. Latinos make up more than 80% of the county's nearly 48,000 residents, and many have to work more than one job to make ends meet. "That time has to come from somewhere," he said.

The research is being conducted jointly with Mariposa Community Health Center, which is gathering data on sleep-related factors such as stress, acculturation and socioeconomic information, said Patty Molina, the center's senior director of community health services and co-principal investigator of the study.

For two weeks, participants receive checkups and take-home devices to monitor sleep patterns. Molina, who is overseeing the study at Mariposa, said non-Hispanic white people also are participating for comparison data. In other parts of the U.S., some studies have found non-Hispanic white people sleep longer and better than other racial or ethnic groups.

Molina said the importance of the Arizona study lies in determining the link between sleep, health and social and environmental factors that "affect a lot of people, especially here along the border."

The study recently restarted after a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ruiz expects it to be completed by the end of this year. The study's findings could be applied in future research of a growing and diversifying Hispanic population, he said.

"We'll have to take that on down the line," Ruiz said. "The Latino population is the younger group by age, meaning that it's only going to be increasing in the proportion of the total population," he said.

"Understanding the health of Latinos is going to be increasingly important as a national priority."

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