

1 in 4 young Australians aren't satisfied with their sleep, finds new research

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New research published today sheds light on the sleep health of young Australians, and how it relates to their physical and mental health, with 60 percent saying their sleep hours are irregular.

The study, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, included 1,234 young adults from Western Australia's Raine Study and is the first of its kind in Australia to comprehensively investigate [sleep health](#) in young adults.

The study showed a significant proportion of young people have suboptimal sleep, with 30 percent of young adults saying they slept less than seven to nine hours a night, and 18 percent taking more than 30 minutes to fall asleep. Sixty percent lacked regular sleep hours.

Researchers also found that many [young people](#) weren't satisfied with their sleep, with 25 percent reporting that their sleep is "fairly bad" or "very bad." Ten percent also reported having impaired daytime alertness.

UniSC Clinical Psychologist and lead researcher Dr. Alex Metse was surprised to find that it was self-reported sleep satisfaction and daytime alertness which had the strongest relationship with young adults' mental and physical health.

"We hear a lot of messaging around the fact that as adults we need seven to nine hours' sleep a night to be healthy—this study shows that it's not that simple.

"Compared to young adults who were satisfied with their sleep, those who were dissatisfied with their sleep had [mental health](#) scores that were 34 percent lower and physical health scores that were seven percent lower.

"Physical and mental health scores were also lower for those who felt less alert during the day, and mental health scores were lower among those who slept less than the recommended duration in the sleep study.

"Previous studies have shown that [poor sleep](#) is associated with chronic

health conditions such as depression and cardiovascular disease. As well as demonstrating how important sleep is to both physical and mental health by showing a clear link, this study helps us understand further the indicators of good sleep when it comes to our health.

"Sleep satisfaction is a subjective measure. This means there might also be opportunities to educate the public about what a 'normal' night sleep looks like which might change expectations and in turn improve satisfaction and help young adults create healthy habits.

"Our findings suggest that it could be easy for health practitioners to ask [young adults](#) one or two questions about their sleep satisfaction and alertness to identify who might be at risk of poor physical and mental health related to poor sleep."

Adjunct Prof Terry Slevin, CEO, Public Health Association of Australia says that the study reinforces that we need an [increasing awareness](#) of how important sleep is for good mental and [physical health](#).

"We have known for a while that sleep disorders like insomnia and sleep apnoea contribute to [poor health](#)—but this new study adds to the growing evidence that suboptimal sleep, even if someone doesn't have a diagnosed sleep disorder, is a public health issue akin to nutrition and physical activity."

"Young adults are in a transition period in their lives where they are establishing healthy lifestyles and habits that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. They are also particularly vulnerable to poor sleep. And it is about quantity AND quality of sleep."

"We need to put sleep on the agenda as a public health issue and look at what measures we can use to improve sleep across all demographics."

"All of us, every day, can reflect on the previous night's sleep and we know the impact that can have on how we feel. But increasingly we are understanding that sleep is just as important a pillar of good health as what we eat and how physically active we are."

More information: Alexandra P. Metse et al, Sleep health of young adults in Western Australia and associations with physical and mental health: A population-level cross-sectional study, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100070](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100070)

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