

Poor sleep health associated with muscle dysmorphia in Canadian young adults

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Getting enough sleep is crucial for our body to maintain vital health

functions and is especially important for the growth and development of adolescents and young adults.

But a new study from the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work found an association between [poor sleep](#) and symptoms of muscle dysmorphia, the pathological pursuit of muscularity that is [increasing in prevalence among young people](#).

[Published](#) in the journal *Sleep Health*, the study surveyed over 900 adolescents and [young adults](#). Participants who reported experiencing greater symptoms of muscle dysmorphia reported fewer hours of sleep and greater difficulty when falling asleep or staying asleep more than half the time over a two-week period.

"Poor sleep can have significant negative impacts for adolescents and young adults, including increased negative mental health symptoms," says lead author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

"Poor sleep among those who experience muscle dysmorphia symptoms is concerning as it may exacerbate the functional and social impairment these individuals commonly report, as well as increase [suicidal thoughts and behaviors](#)."

Prior research supports this cause for concern. Past studies indicate that, on average, adolescents and young adults are sleeping less than the recommended 7 to 10 hours per night. A plethora of research has also found that poor sleep is a marker of mental health diagnoses and is associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and psychosis. Ganson and his colleague's study is the first to investigate the relationship between sleep and muscle dysmorphia.

The mechanisms connecting greater muscle dysmorphia symptomatology

and poor sleep may be multifaceted, say the study's authors. For example, those who have greater intolerance for their appearance, who engage in obsessive thinking, and who experience anxiety related to one's body and muscularity may experience impaired sleep.

Also, for some, sleep may be displaced by [physical activity](#), as an individual engages in muscle-building exercise during the evening hours so as to not interfere with occupational responsibilities.

"Individuals experiencing symptoms of muscle dysmorphia may be more likely to use and consume [dietary supplements](#) that are marketed for improving workouts, increasing [muscle mass](#), and accelerating muscle recovery," says Ganson.

"These products tend to have high levels of caffeine or other stimulants, which may negatively impact sleep. In addition, [anabolic-androgenic steroids, which are commonly used among people with muscle dysmorphia](#), have also been shown to impact sleep negatively."

The authors underscore the need for [health care professionals](#) to be alerted to these findings, given the continued emphasis on the muscular body ideal and the pursuit of muscularity among adolescents and young adults. Additionally, future research is needed to continue to explore the connection between [muscle dysmorphia](#) symptoms and poor sleep to ensure a holistic care approach.

More information: Kyle T. Ganson et al, Associations between muscle dysmorphia symptomatology and sleep duration and difficulty in the Canadian Study of Adolescent Health Behaviors, *Sleep Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.sleh.2023.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2023.12.003)

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