Sleep Matters: Over One-Third of U.S. Adults are Sleep Deficient

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In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the Prevalence of Healthy Sleep Duration among Adults—United States, 2014 report, which found that nearly 35 percent of U.S. adults ages 18-60 are not getting the recommended seven hours of sleep per night. The data was recorded in the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey of 444,306 individuals from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. While the focus has long been on children receiving their recommended hours of sleep per night, the CDC recommends increased focus on educating the public about the importance of adults maintaining a healthy sleep regimen.

Sleep deprivation is associated with increased physical and emotional health risks. Those who do not receive the recommended amount of sleep per night are at higher risk for developing chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke and mental distress, and are generally at a greater risk for mortality. To get more sleep, the CDC recommends behavior changes such as creating a sleep schedule and ensuring the bedroom is dark, quiet, at a comfortable temperature and free of electronic devices. Further, adults should avoid consuming large meals, nicotine, alcohol and caffeine shortly before attempting to sleep. Adults who continue to struggle to establish a healthy sleep routine might find consulting their doctor or a sleep specialist, or receiving psychological or behavioral therapy useful.

The average hours of sleep Americans get each night vary across states.

- Of the respondents in the CDC survey, 11.8 percent reported sleeping five hours or less per night and 23 percent of respondents reported sleeping six hours, less than the recommended seven hours.
- States in the Midwest region have the healthiest sleep regimens.
- States in the South, particularly in the Appalachian region, have the lowest average sleep duration.
- The state with the lowest average of sleep duration per night is Hawaii, where 56.1 percent of citizens get the recommended amount of sleep per night. Hawaii is followed by Kentucky (60.3 percent), Maryland (61.1 percent), Alabama (61.2 percent), Georgia (61.3 percent), Michigan (61.3 percent), Indiana (61.5 percent), South Carolina (61.5 percent), New York (61.6 percent), and West Virginia (61.6 percent).
- The state with the healthiest sleep pattern is South Dakota, where 71.6 percent of citizens get the recommended amount of sleep per night. The remaining top ten states with the healthiest sleep patterns are Colorado (71.5 percent), Minnesota (70.8 percent), Nebraska (69.6 percent), Idaho...
The implications of sleep deprivation extend beyond individual health and can impact public safety and the workforce.

- The CDC recommends that workplace policies should ensure that employees have the opportunity to get their full-recommended hours of sleep per night. This is particularly relevant to professions that often require long irregular hours, such as medical professionals and first call responders and those employed in the transportation industry.
- Sleep-deprivation related incidents can result in a loss in productivity in the workforce and increased medical expenses, leaving a mark on the economy
- The CDC encourages health care providers to promote healthy sleep regimens to patients and to assess the causes of sleep deprivation.

Drowsy drivers are two times more likely to make errors when operating a motor vehicle.

- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, or NHTSA, notes that sleep-related crashes are not only due to falling asleep at the wheel, but also due to drowsiness. Drowsiness causes crashes because a lack of sleep impairs alertness, attention, reaction time, judgement and decision-making.
- New Jersey and Arkansas have drowsy driving laws under which drivers can be charged with vehicular homicide or negligent homicide, respectively, if their sleep deprivation causes a crash fatality. A pending New York bill includes a vehicular homicide offense for fatalities caused by drowsy driving as well as a misdemeanor offense for driving while drowsy.
- NHTSA reports that there were 846 fatalities caused by drowsy driving in 2014.
- Between 2005 and 2009, NHSTA estimates that there were 83,000 crashes related to drowsy driving annually, including an average of nearly 886 fatal crashes.
- The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that 7 percent of all crashes and 16.7 percent of all fatal crashes are caused by drowsy driving.

In addition to varying across geographic locations, the average hours of sleep Americans get each night also vary across racial and ethnic groups, age groups, employment statuses, levels of educational attainment, and relationship statuses.

- Non-Hispanic blacks, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders and multiracial respondents on average sleep less than non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics and Asians.
- Of the respondents ages 65 years and older, 73.7 percent reported getting seven hours or more of sleep per night.
- Of those unable to work or who are unemployed, 51 percent and 60.2 percent, respectively, get the recommended amount of sleep per night. The employed population tends to get more rest, with 64.9 percent reporting getting the recommended amount of seven or more hours per night.
- Of those with a college education or higher, 71.5 percent report getting the recommended amount of sleep per night.
- Married people get more sleep than divorcees, widows, separated people or single individuals who have never been married. Of the married population, 67.4 percent get the recommended amount, compared to 55.7 percent of divorcees, widows and separated couples, and 62.3 percent of the single and never married population.
References:

2 Ibid [5].
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8 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
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