

Australia needs to be awake to sleepiness

Almost a fifth of NSW's adult population doesn't get enough sleep according to research to be published this month in international publication Internal Medicine Journal.

With 11.7% experiencing excessive daytime sleepiness and 18.4% reporting sleeping less than 6.5 hours per night, the study warns the impact of sleep and sleepiness on the public health could be large.

Conducted by the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Sydney, the study provides the first detailed population-based description of the typical sleep behaviour, sleep satisfaction and sleepiness of community-dwelling Australians. It surveyed 3,300 people aged between 18 and 64 years of age, randomly selected from the NSW electoral roll.

Results found excessive daytime sleepiness was most commonly associated with short sleep durations, getting older and symptoms of insomnia and depression.

Dr Delwyn Bartlett, Sleep Psychologist at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and chief author of the paper, explains short sleep, either self-imposed or forced, is being increasingly recognised as a contributor to impaired health and increased death in the community.

"It can impact on everything from cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, insulin sensitivity, appetite, immune responses to vaccinations and concentration levels for even the simplest tasks," she said.

"If the NSW figures are reflective of the nation as a whole, chronic sleep restriction is likely to have a major impact on Australian public health."

Dr Bartlett says the results also indicate a large proportion of people seem to increase their sleep duration at the weekends, 'paying off' the level of sleep-debt that seems to be accruing during the week.

"The long term health effects of this practice are unknown," says Dr Bartlett, "but if you can't achieve a catch-up sleep on the weekend, there is the increased risk of burnout, which has negative social and work related outcomes."

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