

HEALTH REPORT

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NEW RESEARCH FINDS A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP FOR AUSTRALIANS IS NOTHING BUT A FAIRY TALE.

Alarming new statistics show that almost ten percent of Australians are turning to sleeping tablets to help them cope with the nation's rising rate of sleep debt.

New research released today in the Pfizer Australia Health Report, and conducted in conjunction with the Australasian Sleep Association, found that of the one in ten that use sleeping tablets, a third admit to taking them every night.

Associate Professor Harry Teichtahl from the Australasian Sleep Association is concerned at the high use of sleep medications in the community because he believes they often don't address the cause of the sleeping problem.

"Sleeping tablets should as a rule not be used on a regular basis as they don't treat the cause of the sleeplessness," Professor Harry Teichtahl said.

"After around four weeks of continual use tolerance to the sleeping tablets may occur and they are no longer effective.

"Often those addicted to sleeping pills will wake feeling drowsy, so they are probably left feeling more lethargic than they would have if they hadn't started relying on sleeping tablets in the first place.

"A much better approach is to work out the cause of the insomnia and then develop a plan to resolve it."

And according to the findings, sleep disturbances aren't just a problem for those taking sleeping tablets. This national sleep study estimates that as many as 80 percent of Australians are experiencing some issue with sleeping which is negatively impacting their waking life as they reported waking up on average at least one or two times during their sleep. Twenty percent reported being disturbed between three and five times every night.

In addition, close to two-thirds reported difficulty going to sleep.

As a result, two in five say they do not wake up feeling refreshed and close to two-thirds feel sleepy during the day more often than once a week.

"The high levels of self reported night waking found by this study suggests that sleeping problems are much more common than we had previously believed," Professor Harry Teichtahl said. "This is of concern because over time, sleep deprivation can lead to an



inability to deal with stress, ill health, irritability and feeling distracted and unfocused. It's a major public health issue."

Not surprisingly, more than 70 percent of those surveyed feel their ability to get to sleep is affected by the level of work/school or everyday stresses, and that they sleep better when relaxed.

"Insomnia is often caused by worrying," he said. "This, combined with the long hours and stresses of our 24 hour society, is a recipe for leaving the majority of the population living in a constant state of fatigue. Not a healthy, or safe, way to live.

"Sleep is important because it is a period of rest and recuperation for the body and brain. Using medications to aid insomnia only masks the problem and those people who are in the habit of having an afternoon nap and trying to sleep in on the weekend are only reinforces the cycle of poor sleeping patterns," he added.

Sleep deprivation and sleep restriction is very common with teenagers. According to the study, teenagers are unaware of the difference between feeling fatigued, lethargic and feeling sleepy.

"Teenagers' busy school, work and social schedules mean that sleep often becomes a last priority. But by compromising sleep and forgoing good sleep hygiene, teenagers are setting themselves up for a lifetime of bad sleeping habits," Professor Teichtahl said.

Other key findings in this month's Pfizer Australia Health Report show that:

- Just under 25 percent of Australians have their sleep disrupted by others in the household who snore on a regular basis
- On average, Australians feel sleepy for approximately five months of the year
- Just over 25 percent Australians have their sleep regularly interrupted because others in the household have different hours of sleep.

The Australasian Sleep Association's top tips for getting a good night sleep include:

- Ensure regular sleep patterns by going to bed at the same time each night and aiming for eight hours a night
- Limit alcohol and caffeine intake
- Resist the temptation to nap during the day
- Learn how to relax. Stress is a major cause of insomnia so find a relaxation technique that works for you
- Avoid sleeping pills. They don't address the cause of the sleeping problem
- Improve your sleeping environment. Make it dark, quiet and comfortable
- Seek professional help when you suffer symptoms of mood swings, restless sleep, snoring and feeling unrefreshed on waking

The Australasian Sleep Association has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to assist with educating the public about the sleeping patterns of Australians to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

Findings are based on responses from 1,600 Australians aged 13 years and over. The research was conducted in 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research. Pfizer Australia is the nation's leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au

INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE WITH ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HARRY TEICHTAHL FROM THE AUSTRALASIAN SLEEP ASSOCIATION

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