



## Will your hectic lifestyle mean an early grave?

EARLY to bed, early to rise was the motto of previous generations but with lifestyles getting busier, many of us burn the candle at both ends.

Michael Oko, a sleep disorder specialist from United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust, says that people need to take sleep more seriously.

"It's really important to go through the deep levels of sleep every night," he says.

"Anyone who has had a bad night's sleep will know that the next day they will be grumpy, tired and have trouble concentrating on things."

And now the theory that weekend lie-ins can help to catch up on skipped sleep during the week has been blown

### Experts warn that lack of sleep can be dangerous

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out of the water.

A new study about the effects of sleep deprivation shows hard evidence that we are unable to catch up on missed sleep if it happens on a regular basis.

If we miss a few hours infrequently, our bodies will try to catch up by making us have longer and deeper sleep the next night, but this natural reaction can't cope with chronic sleep deprivation.



**SLEEPER:**  
Michael Oko, a sleep disorder specialist.

The report showed that when rats were particularly sleep deprived over consecutive days, they no longer attempted to use the natural catch-up system, despite an accumulating sleep deficit.

This proved that the body's natural ability to compensate for missed sleep was no longer functioning, damaging both physical and mental health.

"People should realise that sleep deprivation has been used as a form of torture in the past, it really is something to take very seriously," says Mr Oko.

Engineer Damien Jones thinks his lie-ins at the weekend help him feel revived.

"I work all week and if I spent more time sleeping I wouldn't have any time for a social life. I'm sure the research is valid, but having a long lie-in has always helped me feel more energetic at the weekend," says Mr Jones.

The associated risks of missing out on quality slumber time include obesity, heart disease and depression, not to mention poor concentration and diminished brain power.

Sleep experts recommend we have at least four hours of uninterrupted sleep each night to allow the body to recharge.

It is estimated that in the 1960s people slept for about

- Snoring champion Melvin Switzer had a 92 decibel snore – louder than a pneumatic drill.
- Cows can sleep standing up, but can only dream lying down.
- The record for the longest period without sleep is 18 days, 21 hours, 40 minutes during a rocking chair marathon. The record holder reported hallucinations, paranoia, blurred vision, slurred speech and memory and concentration lapses.
- 20 per cent of road accidents are sleep-related.
- People can nap with their eyes open without even being aware of it.
- A new baby typically results in 400-750 hours of lost sleep for parents in the first year.
- The continuous brain recordings that led to the discovery of REM (rapid eye-movement) sleep were not done until 1953, partly because the scientists involved were concerned about wasting paper.
- A study in 1998 showed that a bright light shone on the

- backs of human knees can reset the brain's sleep-wake clock.
- Ducks at risk of attack by predators are able to balance the need for sleep and survival, keeping one half of the brain awake while the other slips into sleep mode.



**LIKE A BABY:** Catching up on your sleep isn't as easy as enjoying a lie-in at the weekend.

eight hours a night.

But now experts say that it is the norm for people to be getting around six hours of sleep per night.

"It is increasingly the case that the pressures of today's lifestyle mean that we don't allow enough time for sleep, but people ignore sleep at their own peril," says Mr Oko.

### Getting a good night's sleep

- Take a warm bath before bed and drink a caffeine-free hot drink.
- Breathe through your nose for three seconds, then breathe out for three seconds. Practise this for 10 minutes at night.
- Sprinkle lavender oil on your pillow to aid relaxation.
- Don't eat a big meal before

going to bed as your body will be more concerned with digesting than shutting down for a restful night.

- Set a regular bedtime and wake up time, which will help you anchor your own body clock.
- Try not to go to bed until you feel tired or you won't be able to sleep.