



Sleep Well to Protect Your Heart

A joint study by researchers from the University of Warwick and University College London suggests that proper sleep is very important for the heart. According to the researchers, both too much and too little sleep doubles the risk of fatal cardiovascular disease.

The two teams took a look at sleep patterns of 10,308 civil servants over a period of 20 years and the number of deaths that had taken place during this period. Initial data was collected in 1985-88 and then followed-up in 1992-93.

The primary conclusion they arrived at was that those who reduced their sleeping from seven hours a night to five doubled their heart risk in comparison to those who continued sleeping seven hours a night. A similar increase in risk was seen for those who increased their sleeping to at least eight hours.

The researchers made adjustments for possible sleep affecting factors such as age, sex, marital status, employment grade, smoking status and physical activity. These adjustments allowed them to determine the changes in sleep patterns over five years and the resultant effects on mortality rates 11-17 years later.

They found that sticking to the recommended seven hours a night of sleep was the best option; those who reduced their sleeping to five hours a night had double the risk of a fatal cardiovascular problem and a 1.7 times higher risk of death from all causes. Increasing sleep from seven to eight hours or more a night on the other hand was also found to double of the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Commenting on their study that is to be presented to the British Sleep Society, researcher Professor Francesco Cappuccio said, Fewer hours sleep and greater levels of sleep disturbance have become widespread in industrialised societies.

This change, largely the result of sleep curtailment to create more time for leisure and shift-work, has meant that reports of fatigue, tiredness and ex-

cessive daytime sleepiness are more common than a few decades ago, he said.

Sleep represents the daily process of physiological restitution and recovery, and lack of sleep has far-reaching effects, Professor Cappuccio added. According to the researchers, lack of sleep is also linked to an increased risk of putting on weight, high blood pressure and type-2 diabetes.

Professor Cappuccio however, believes that the link between too much sleep and poor health is quite clear. At the same time, he feels that if a person stays in bed for an extended period, it could be a sign of depression or some disease related fatigue. Our findings indicate that consistently sleeping around seven hours per night is optimal for health and a sustained reduction may predispose to ill-health, he said.

Dr. Neil Stanley, a sleep expert from Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, said while public health messages focused on diet and exercise, people were given very little information about the need to get proper amounts of sleep.

This study is yet more evidence of the importance of getting sleep and the right amount of sleep for you, he said. Sleep need is like height or shoe size: we all have an individual one, and if we sleep less or more than that then there are consequences to pay.