

Poor sleep can damage brain health in later life

Experts have found that in order to stay mentally sharp and maintain a healthy brain, we must make it a priority to get the required amount of sleep in later life.

What happens to our sleep as we get older?

The latest report into sleep and later life was conducted by the Global Council on Brain Health, an initiative jointly convened by Age UK and the AAR.

The results show that sleeping becomes harder as we age; our sleep patterns change, which makes us more vulnerable to waking up during the night and earlier in the morning.

Why does this affect our health?

Everyone should try and aim for 7-8 hours' sleep. If not, feeling sluggish and under the weather is a common experience if we don't sleep well. However, there are more serious consequences for those of us who have chronic, inadequate sleep on a regular basis; higher risk of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, fall-related injuries, and cancer.

“Sleeping is something we all tend to take for granted, but we really have to wise up to the fact that getting the right amount of good sleep is crucial as we age, helping to protect us from all kinds of problems that can affect our brains as well as our bodies.

James Goodwin, Chief Scientist at Age UK,

Factors that disturb your sleep:

These can be either environmental, such as the temperature of a room, or related to lifestyle factors such as eating late or taking certain medications.

Sleep disorders such as sleep apnea are also more common in later life and 'deep sleep' decreases in adults between the ages of 30 to 60.

How to improve your sleep quality

The report includes a number of tips for people from middle age onwards to employ throughout the day to improve the quality of their sleep which include:

- Get up at the same time every day
- Expose yourself to natural sunlight during the daytime
- Don't drink alcohol to help you to sleep
- Try and eat dinner approximately 3 hours before going to bed
- Don't drink coffee (caffeine) after lunch time
- Don't look at an electronic screen of any kind after you get into bed – tablet, phone, laptop, etc.
- Avoid using over the counter sleep preparations
- Wear socks to keep your feet warm in bed
- Don't sleep with pets in the bedroom!
- Avoid arguments with spouse or partner before going to bed!
- Limit afternoon naps to less than 30 minutes

For more information visit the [Age UK Press release page](#).