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Sleep deprivation costs the U.S. economy billions each year

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Sleep-deprived Americans are not only hurting their health, but the economy as well.

The U.S. economy loses up to \$411 billion each year in working days lost due to sleep deprivation, according to RAND Corporation [study](#) (http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1791/RAND_RR1791.pdf) that examined the effects of sleep deprivation in five industrialized countries revealed that.

This translates to "an equivalent of about 1.23 million working days due to insufficient sleep," the research firm stated.

The lack of sleep has become so prevalent in America that the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared insufficient sleep a 'public health problem.'

A CDC [study](#) (<https://www.cdc.gov/features/dssleep/index.html#References>) found that more than one-third of American adults are not getting enough sleep on a regular basis.

Sleep deprivation has been linked to car accidents, industrial disasters, and medical and other occupational errors.

Research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety shows that drowsy drivers pose the same risks as drunk drivers.

"The estimated rate ratio for crash involvement associated with driving after only 4-5 hours of sleep compared with 7 hours or more is similar to the U.S. government's estimates of the risk associated with driving with a blood alcohol concentration equal to or slightly above the legal limit for alcohol in the U.S," the foundation [states](#) (<https://www.aaafoundation.org/acute-sleep-deprivation-and-crash-risk>) on its website.

With so much at stake, why aren't adults getting enough sleep?

Stress is the number one culprit.

A [survey](#) (<http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2013/sleep.aspx>) by the American Psychological Association found that 42 percent of adults reported that their sleep quality was fair or poor and 43 percent reported that stress had caused them to lie awake at night in the past month.

Dr. Kathleen Hall, founder and CEO of The Stress Institute and Mindful Living Network said the two biggest stressors are money and work, but stress caused by family responsibility has increased exponentially.

"We see that rising almost up to money and work," Hall said. "The reason is because of time. People are finding out more and more that they don't have time for family responsibilities and families are disintegrating, so that's a big concern."

People often underestimate how detrimental stress can be to the body, and fail to distinguish the difference between acute stress and chronic stress.

"Stress is the driver of most diseases," Hall said. "Stress is the epidemic of the 21st century. We were made to go 55 miles per hour, and in the world we're living in, with technology, we're all putting our pedal to the medal and thinking our minds, bodies and souls can go 95 (miles per hour), and we can't."

According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) annual Stress in America Survey, 65 percent of Americans listed work as a top stressor in 2012.

In 2013, a [survey](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/work-stress.aspx) (<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/work-stress.aspx>) by APA's Center for Organizational Excellence found that more than one-third of working Americans reported experiencing chronic work-related stress, with just 36 percent of participants reporting that their employers provide sufficient resources to help them manage that stress.

Hall said employers need to train supervisors and managers to recognize the symptoms of stress in the workplace and provide resources to combat it.

"It's absolutely unconscionable, it should be illegal," Hall said. "We should tax corporations and punish them in some vein -- whether its taxation or however it would hurt their bottom line -- if they don't have proactive stress management, stress reduction and mindfulness programs."

A second reason American adults are sleep deprived is due to excessive electronic media use. Although technology has improved our lives in many ways, many adults are unable to resist the pull from electronic media.

Jan Van den Bulck, a media-effects researcher and a Communication Studies professor at the University of Michigan, said limiting the amount of time spent on electronic media devices, especially at night, is challenging.

"Self-control is like a battery or a muscle -- it wears out during the day by using it," Van den Bulck said. "So by definition, it's at its lowest right before bed -- at the very moment where we need to resist the pull from the media."

Van den Bulck said one of the ways society can fight back against technology interfering with our sleep is by setting boundaries. This might include company-wide policies discouraging sending and receiving work-related emails at night.

"Maybe as a society we're asking too much of individuals when we expect them to answer emails within the next couple of hours, and when as a society we keep sending them to you at all hours of the day," Van den Bulck said.

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