

## Sleep Awareness Week 2019

Our first national Sleep Awareness Week focuses on three key themes.

### 1. ~~Safe~~ Better Sleep, Safer Lives

Getting enough good quality sleep is vital for staying safe at work and on the road.

Sleepiness is a symptom that you are needing more sleep and eventually the urge to sleep becomes uncontrollable. As you get sleepier, you get more likely to make mistakes and choose riskier options. Whatever you are trying to do, your brain gets less and less able to deliver high quality performance and you become less and less able to judge how well you are doing.

In the workplace, these changes caused by lack of sleep are recognised as fatigue, which is a cause of hazards (Health and Safety at Work Act 2015).

Shift work creates problems for sleep because it requires people to work against the circadian body clock, which tries to keep our bodies and brains in step with the day/night cycle and programmes us to sleep at night. The circadian body clock is sensitive to light (even through closed eye lids) and does not adapt fully to work schedules that require people to be awake at times when they should be asleep.

- Around 20% of New Zealand workers are involved in rotating shift work, with or without night shift. This doubles their risk of reporting a work-related injury <sup>1</sup>.

In 2017, the New Zealand Transport Agency identified driver fatigue as a factor in 32 fatal crashes (9%), 100 serious injury crashes (4%) and 474 minor injury crashes (6%). Independent New Zealand research shows that:

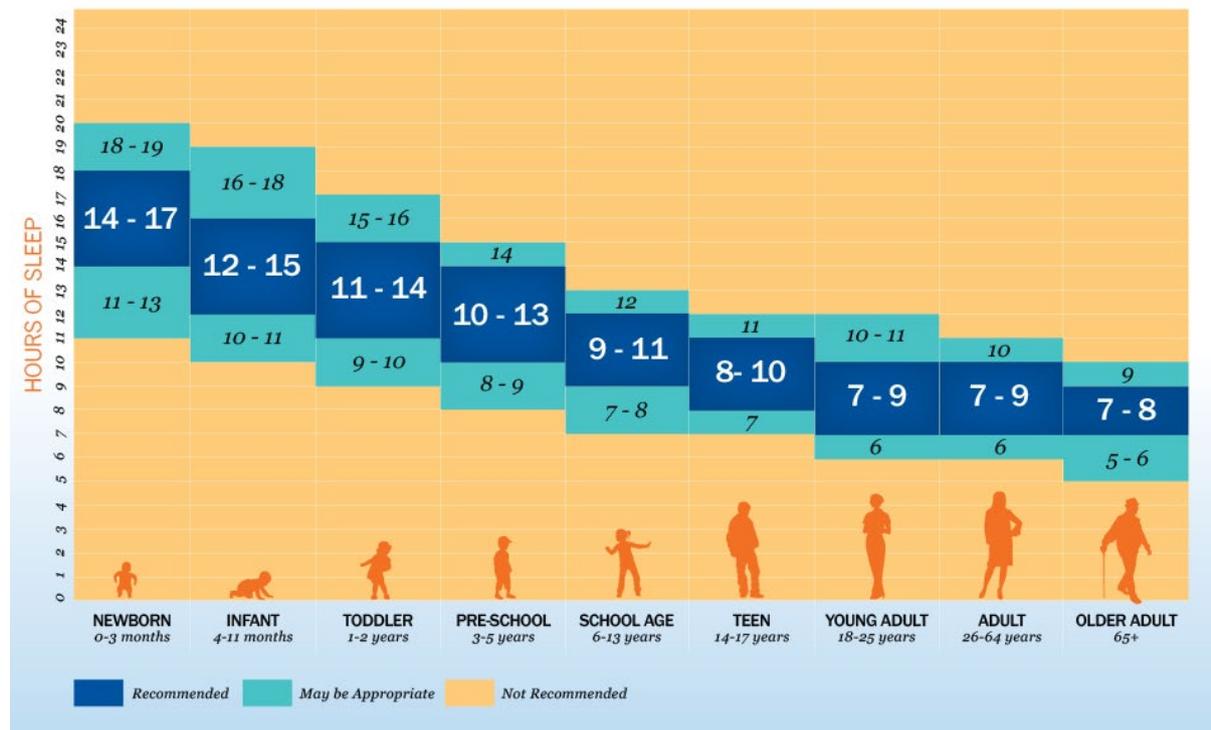
- people who never or rarely get enough sleep, or who have any chance of dozing while stopped in traffic for a few minutes, are more likely to have been the driver in a motor vehicle accident, after taking into account the effects of age, sex, and weekly driving hours.<sup>2</sup>
- Injury accidents on Auckland roads could be reduced by 19% if people avoiding driving when they felt sleepy, or with less than 5 hours sleep in the prior 24 hours, or between 2 am and 5 am (when sleepiness is strongest for most people).<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Healthy Sleep, Healthy Aging

Every year, the World Sleep Society hosts 'World Sleep Day' to recognize the importance of sleep and its impact on our health.

To emphasize the importance of sleep at any age, the slogan for World Sleep Day 2019 (15 March) is 'Healthy Sleep, Health Aging'. A press release can be found at <http://worldsleepday.org/2019-press-release>

The **amount** of sleep needed to stay healthy and function well changes with age.<sup>4</sup>



The **quality** of sleep needed to stay healthy and function also changes with age<sup>5</sup> and can be disrupted by a range of sleep disorders. Many of these are treatable, but diagnosis and treatment services in Aotearoa/New Zealand are not adequate to meet the need.

Most research in New Zealand has focused on adults. In a national survey<sup>6,7</sup>, 29% of Māori and 25% of non-Māori report having a sleep problem that has lasted at least 6 months. This difference is explained by the effects of socio-economic deprivation, unemployment and night work, which are all more common among Māori. Chronic sleep problems affected many aspects of these peoples' lives, including difficulties with concentration, memory, getting things done, coping with minor problems, as well as poorer general health, relationships with family and friends, and general quality of life.

Internationally, it is acknowledged that there are three pillars of health for people of all ages: regular exercise, good nutrition, and getting enough good quality sleep on a regular basis. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals receive minimal training in sleep, which is a third of their patients' lives, as well as their own.

### 3. Sleep is a Basic Human Right

Sleep is essential for health and well-being. Recent international court cases have argued that sleep should be considered a basic human right protected by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>8</sup>

In 2009, a group of homeless people in Boise, Idaho sued the city and the police for waking them up and moving them on when they were sleeping in public outdoor spaces because there was nowhere else to go (the night shelters were full). The US Department of Justice supported their claim, arguing that because sleeping is a universal and unavoidable consequence of being human that is necessary for human survival, penalizing homeless individuals for sleeping in public when they cannot access shelter space constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. The lawsuit was eventually dismissed on procedural grounds in 2015.

In 2012, a night time raid by police on a camp of sleeping protestors led to a case in the Supreme Court of India. Justice Chauhan found that

*'An individual is entitled to sleep as comfortably and as freely as he breathes. Sleep is essential for a human being to maintain the delicate balance of health necessary for its very existence and survival. Sleep is, therefore, a fundamental and basic requirement without which the existence of life itself would be in peril. To disturb sleep, therefore, would amount to torture, which is now accepted as a violation of human right.'*

Based on the 2013 census, at least one in every hundred New Zealanders is homeless. Of these 10% (about 4,000 people) are living on the street, in cars, or in other improvised dwellings.<sup>9</sup> On 20 November 2018, Tauranga City Council passed a bylaw banning begging and rough sleeping near retail and hospitality premises.

## References

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