Embargoed: 00:01, Friday 15th March, 2019

**Sleep Health Foundation Report finds Older Australians not sleeping particularly well, but reporting considerably less sleep-related fatigue and irritability than younger people**

Older Australians might toss and turn at night, but they’re still more likely than younger people to bounce out of bed in the morning, new sleep data shows.

Uplifting research released today on World Sleep Day has found that people aged 65 and over are happier with their shut-eye than those who are younger.

“We found that older people are not sleeping particularly well, but they have considerably less sleep-related fatigue and irritability than younger people,” says Professor Robert Adams, a sleep specialist with the Sleep Health Foundation. “It’s positive to see that despite some pretty significant disruption older people are, on the whole, less bothered by a bad night’s sleep and wake feeling refreshed.”

The new data was collected from 1011 people Australia-wide who answered a detailed questionnaire about their sleep habits, sleep problems, work life, income, mental health and personal details like age, sex and education. The sample included 175 people aged over 65.

The data release coincides with World Sleep Day, which this year is focused on ageing and healthy sleep.

“We found more than half (52 per cent) of older people wake a lot in the night, compared to 40 per cent of younger people. They’re also more likely to wake too early (40 vs 33 per cent) and have just as much difficulty falling asleep at night,” Professor Adams says. “But, and it’s a big but, how they feel about this sleep differs considerably from working-age people.

“A third wake up feeling unrefreshed, compared with 48 per cent of other people, and 61 per cent feel they get adequate sleep, compared to 47 per cent of those under 65.”

Professor Adams believes older people may have their relaxed retiree lifestyle to thank for the results. “My feeling is their daytime demands are lower in general,” he says. “They’ve got less time pressure, less general stress and more flexibility so don’t feel as fatigued.”

However, that’s just a hunch. “It’s also possible that older Australians have learnt to mask their sleep problem with caffeine, as results show 28 per cent have 4-5 caffeinated drinks a day,” Professor Adams says. “If that’s the case that’s nothing to celebrate.” He warned caffeine should not be consumed in the evenings if you want to optimise the chance of better quality sleep.

The specialist said the take home message was a positive one. “I think many people will be happy to know that increasingly tiredness and fatigue are not an inevitable consequence of getting older,” Professor Adams says. “In fact your sleep can actually improve with age.”

He warned that overall however, sleep issues reported in the study were quite significant, and any older Australians with concerns about their sleep should speak to their GP or a sleep specialist.

Dr Moira Junge, a board member of Sleep Health Foundation, Australia’s leading advocate for healthy sleep, says getting a good night’s sleep is the key to looking after your physical, cognitive and emotional health as you age.

“We know from large-scale international studies that sleeping well in young adulthood and middle age reduces the risk of obesity and hypertension, protects against age-related cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s disease, and has been associated with decreased rates of depression,” Dr Junge says. “In fact, in some studies good sleep has even been shown to be associated with fewer signs of ageing in facial skin and better tissue tone.

“Getting your forty winks can help you feel better, be better, and look better too.”

**For further information, contact Sleep Health Foundation media consultant Lucy Williams on mobile: 0403 753 028.**

**About Sleep Health Foundation**

The Sleep Health Foundation is Australia’s leading advocate for sleep health. The Foundation aims to improve people’s sleep and their lives by promoting healthy sleep, raising awareness of sleep disorders and building partnerships with organisations. Free, independent, expert-reviewed fact sheets on every aspect of sleep are available at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au).

[Ageing & Sleep Fact sheet](https://d.docs.live.net/41eec0d61f239dbc/Documents/SHF/older-people-and-sleeping.html)

[World Sleep Day information](https://d.docs.live.net/41eec0d61f239dbc/Documents/SHF/key-events/world-sleep-day.html)

ENDS