



# e-quilibrium

- *"electronic briefs on behavior and health"*

Volume 8, Number 10  
October 2012

## Family and Sleep

It is estimated that each year at least 30% of adults report difficulty falling or staying asleep, and most sleep experts report a trend for American adults to be getting less sleep than they need. Given the health, social, work, and safety consequences of sleep deprivation, inadequate sleep is a significant societal problem.

Numerous factors affect a person's ability to sleep and the quality of that sleep. These include environmental, health/biological, psychological, behavioral, work-related, and social factors. Family relationships, especially with family members living in the home, have been examined with respect to sleep quality. Married individuals tend to report better sleep than their single counterparts. The presence of children in the house does not seem to have a consistent effect on sleep quality for parents, as results of studies have been mixed. It is clear that conflict among the family members in a household has an adverse impact on sleep quality.

Several months ago, a study was published in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior examining how relationships with family members outside the household (parents, siblings, grown children) affect sleep quality. Not surprisingly, the presence of strain/conflict in such relationships is associated with poorer sleep, especially if this isn't buffered by the presence of other supportive family relationships. Having frequent contacts with non-residential family members (multiple times a day) was associated with either poorer or better sleep, depending upon whether the interactions with family members were negative or positive, respectively. That is,

frequent contact with family members is associated with better sleep quality if these relationships are supportive, not strained. Otherwise, less frequent contact is better for sleep quality.

In general, good relationships are associated with better health, while relationships marked by strain and discord are associated with poorer health. It has also been established that bad relationships seem to harm health more than good relationships benefit health. Sleep appears to be one of the important means by which the quality of relationships affects health.

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