Lack of Sleep Among Teens May Lead to Future Heart Troubles

Parental advisory: Remove devices with screens from adolescents' bedrooms to improve the quantity and quality of their sleep.

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Heart disease is still the leading cause of death in the United States. As if that's not scary enough, new findings published in the journal Pediatrics suggest that adolescents who don't receive adequate sleep are at increased risk for cardiovascular problems, reports HealthDay.

For the study, researchers wanted to go beyond previous studies showing that individuals suffering from sleep deprivation are at a higher risk for obesity, a well-known risk factor for heart problems.

To explore whether not getting enough shuteye affects other heart disease factors among kids, scientists recruited 829 teenagers, age 13 on average, to wear movement sensors at bedtime for seven to 10 days. The devices were designed to track the duration of children's sleep and whether they experienced restless slumber. In addition, researchers screened the kids for heart health risk factors.

According to study results, only 2.2 percent of study participants met or exceeded the average recommended amount of sleep for their age group (nine hours per day for youngsters age 11 to 13 and eight hours per day for teens 14 to 17). On average, kids slept a little more than seven hours each day while nearly a third snoozed less than seven hours.

Teenagers who slept less than seven hours each night were more likely to suffer from excess body fat, higher blood pressure, wider waist circumference and lower levels of "good" HDL cholesterol, which are all risk factors for heart disease.

"Television viewing is still the dominant way these children are consuming media, but small screens are a concern as well because you can bring those right into your bedroom," said Elizabeth Cespedes Feliciano, a staff scientist at the Kaiser Permanente Northern California Division of Research in California, the study's lead researcher. "I do think screen media is a culprit for short and disrupted sleep, especially in this population that's very plugged in."

Feliciano suggested that parents make children's bedrooms screen-free zones to help improve the

duration and quality of sleep among this population.

Click here to learn how obesity and other factors put young people at greater risk for sudden cardiac arrest.

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