

## EDITORIAL

# Sleep Duration: A Consensus Conference

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Perhaps the number one question asked of the sleep medicine community—from specialized sleep clinics to informal cocktail parties—is: “How much sleep do I really need?” Of course, the answer is complicated and dependent on which aspects of human health and physiology are considered. Genetic factors, environmental influences, and individual susceptibility to the effects of sleep curtailment all play a role in determining the answer. However, efforts to explain these details to patients and laypersons are often futile. Our sound bite driven, Twitter saturated, short attention span world demands a succinct answer to this important question.

In 2013, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, in partnership with the Sleep Research Society and other organizations, established a five year cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called the National Healthy Sleep Awareness Project (NHSAP). NHSAP is focused on the four sleep health goals as delineated in Healthy People 2020, one of which is to increase the proportion of adults who get sufficient sleep from a baseline of 69.6% to 70.8%<sup>1</sup>, roughly equivalent to an additional 3.5 million Americans. In the course of building strategies to accomplish this goal, Project members realized “sufficient sleep” is not consistently defined amongst the lay public or even in professional circles, a circumstance which ultimately creates confusion and compromises efforts to increase sleep prioritization in society. With this in mind, a consensus conference was conceived to determine sufficient sleep for a healthy adult.

The consensus conference will follow a modified RAND Appropriateness Method<sup>2</sup> to achieve its goal. A group of thought leaders will follow an iterative, evidence-based voting process to achieve consensus on the definition of adequate sleep for a healthy adult. The first step is performing a comprehensive literature search to assess all relevant studies for inclusion in evidence tables. Because the three key components to healthy sleep are adequate duration, appropriate timing, and the absence of sleep diseases, we will exclude literature addressing sleep duration in shift work, sleep diseases or other illnesses, and studies assessing treatment effects (e.g., pharmacological or behavioral) on sleep length. Studies focused on sleep quality or fatigue will also be excluded as neither specifies sleep duration and is therefore uninformative to the process.

The modified RAND Appropriateness Method focuses on various “indications,” which are questions posed to the group

regarding the amount of sleep considered sufficient to support optimal health. Project members acknowledge the scientific literature addressing the impact of sleep duration on health involves numerous aspects of human physiology. As such, eight health domains have been defined to categorize the literature and facilitate the voting process, these include: functional, cardiovascular, metabolic, immune, mental health, pain, cancer, and longevity. Age and sex may also influence sleep need and the impact of these variables will be considered in the voting process, as appropriate. Members will generate a consensus recommendation for each of the eight domains, then collapse these recommendations into a final succinct recommendation for the amount of sleep considered sufficient for a healthy adult. Members will seek endorsement of the final recommendation by NHSAP stakeholders, including the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, Sleep Research Society, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the hopes the consensus recommendation provides a coalescing framework for future investigations assessing the impact of sleep duration on human health.

Project members acknowledge their recommendation is not an “answer” to any specific individual, but rather, an invitation to a conversation with the general public about the importance of sleep in their lives. By simply asking the question, “How much sleep do I really need?” our society stands on the pre-contemplative precipice of elevating sleep in their concept of optimal personal health. The onus is now on the sleep community to deliver the best, most reasoned answer possible in hopes of elevating the importance of sleep in the national consciousness to the same level of awareness as diet and exercise. This lofty goal will not be achieved overnight, of course, but the hope is that the consensus process will hasten our journey to a well sleeping society of the future.

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## CITATION

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