

Healthy Living and Sleep: Mid-life and Older Adults’ Opinions, Experiences, and Challenges

2024 Healthy Living Theme Month
Survey on Sleep Experiences Among
Adults Ages 40 and Older

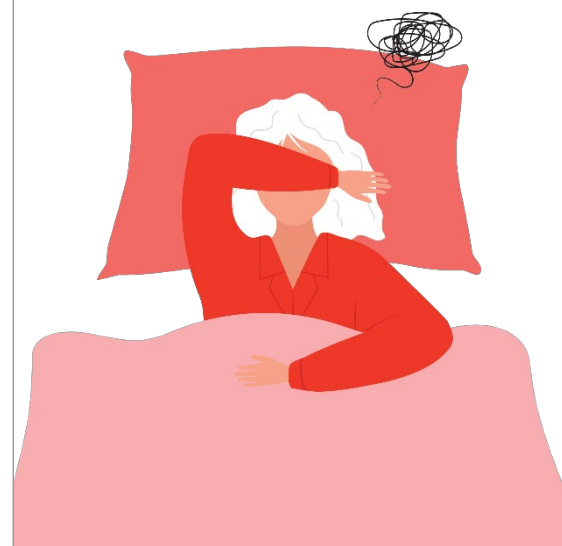


Despite perceived good health overall, over half of all adults age 40-plus report sleep-related problems.

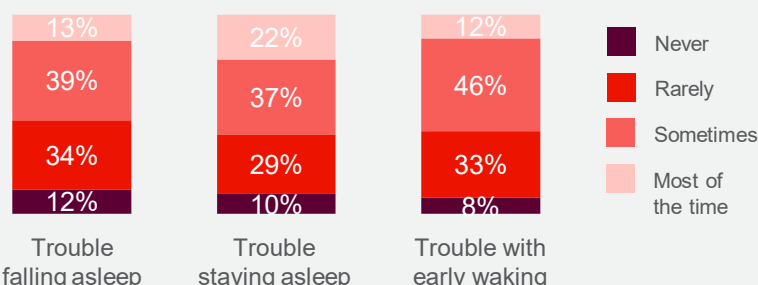
The vast majority of older adults rate various aspects of their health as either good, very good or excellent. Nine in 10 (89%) rate their brain health as good or better and eight in 10 or more rate their mental health (86%), emotional health (84%) and physical health (79%) as good or better. However, over half (55%) reported that in the two previous weeks before the study, they were bothered by difficulties falling or staying asleep.

In fact, seven in 10 (70%) adults age 40-plus report they have at least one sleep-related problem. Half or more report continual problems with falling asleep (52%), waking too early (58%), and/ or an inability to sleep through the night (59%). For two-thirds (68%) of these adults, their sleep difficulties have been going on for two years or longer.

Recent survey findings suggest the majority of adults age 40-plus have at least one sleep-related problem.



Frequency of experience





“I fall asleep... but I always wake up right away. I don’t even know I’m sleeping and then I wake up and can’t go back to sleep. I know when I sleep, I’m just going to pop back up again. I’d say [it’s been] the last four years or so.”

(Female, 65+)

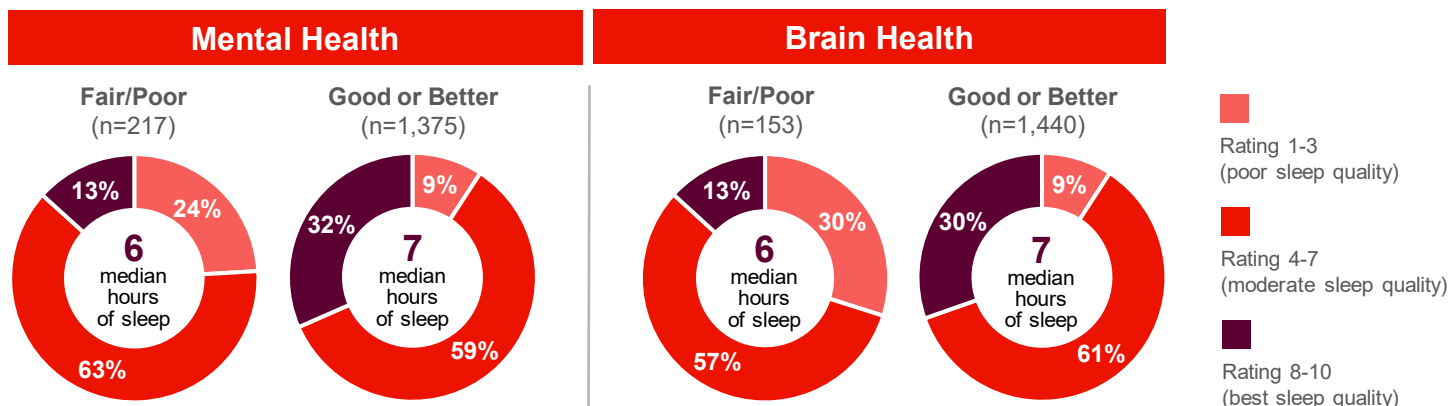
Self-assessed mental health and brain health correlates with self-assessed sleep quality.

Nearly all adults 40-plus recognize sleep as a critical component for various aspects of health with the vast majority saying it is important (either somewhat or very) for brain health (97%) and mental health (97%).

Not only are those who rate their mental and brain health low reporting—on average—less sleep, they also rate their quality of sleep lower.

Those who rate their mental health and brain health as only “fair” or “poor” are also more likely to average less sleep per night and experience poor sleep quality. About one in 10 middle-aged and older adults rate their brain health (10%) and/or mental health (13%) as either fair or poor. This cohort is more likely to say they get fewer hours of sleep compared to those who rate their mental and/or brain health as good or better. Those who rate their mental and/or brain health as only fair or poor on average report about 6 hours of sleep compared to the 7 hours reported by those who rate their mental and brain health higher.

Not only are those who rate their mental and brain health low reporting—on average—less sleep, they also rate their quality of sleep lower. A quarter (24%) of the middle-aged and older adults who rate their mental health low say the quality of their sleep is poor (1 to 3 out of 10) compared to only 9% of those who rate their mental health higher. Similarly, three in 10 (30%) of those who rate their brain health low also say the quality of their sleep is poor (1 to 3 out of 10) compared to only 9% of those who rate their brain health higher.

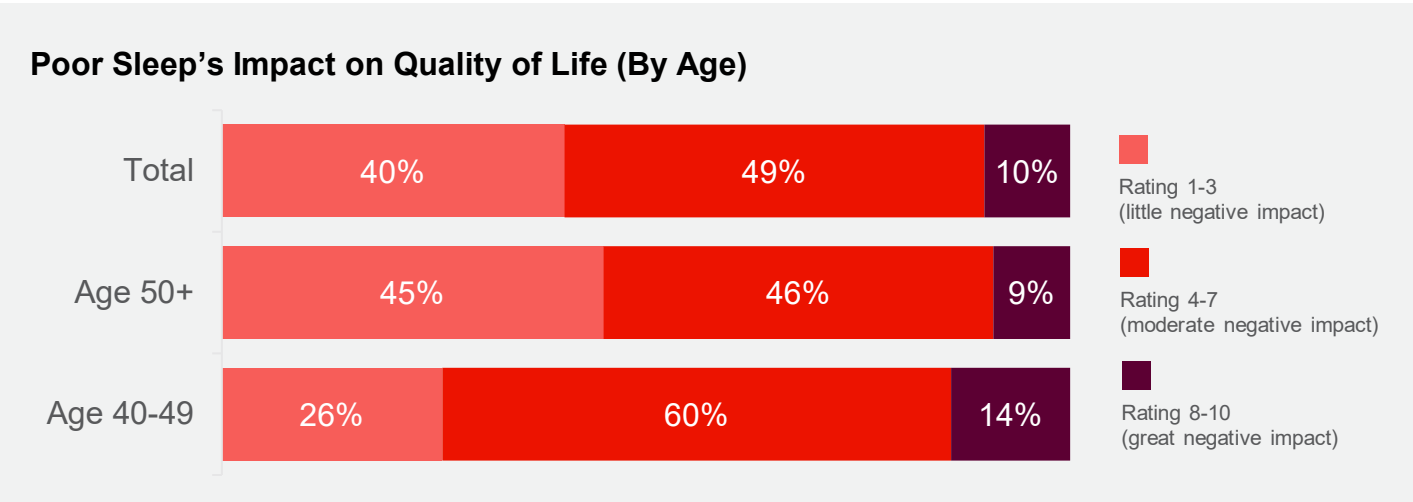


Sleep-related difficulties can go on for years, negatively impacting quality of life

Nearly seven in 10 (68%) adults age 40-plus who have sleep-related difficulties report they have been struggling for two or more years. When asked about how their sleep challenges have affected their quality of life, the majority say their sleep, or lack thereof, has negatively impacted their quality of life. Using a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 representing little negative impact and 10 representing the greatest negative impact, 59% of adults 40-plus with sleep-related difficulties say their poor sleep negatively impacts their quality of life—at least to a moderate degree (a rating of 4 or higher). Those age 40 to 49 are significantly more likely than adults age 50-plus to say their poor sleep has negatively affected their quality of life (74% vs. 55%).



“I get short and snippy and I’m not able to participate in relationships the way I’d like to...I’m forgetful... It’s affecting a lot of different areas of my life right now... I don’t want to do anything, and I’m grumpy as hell.”
(Female, 40-55)



Most mid-life and older adults who have sleep-related problems have not sought professionals help.

While half (53%) of adults age 40-plus report their doctor or other primary care professional has discussed their sleep quality during a routine exam, six in 10 (59%) who have at least one sleep-related problem have never sought professional help. Of those who have received professional treatment for their sleep-related challenges, half (52%) have been prescribed medication and most (80%) say the medication has been at least somewhat effective. A third (32%) of those who have sought professional treatment received a CPAP machine and six in 10 (59%) say it has been effective.

Half (53%) of the adults age 40-plus who have at least one sleep-related problem report they have sought non-professional treatment(s) to help with their challenges. Women are significantly more likely than men to say they have tried non-professional treatments (60% vs. 47%). Over-the-counter (OTC) medications (52%) are the most common non-professional sleep treatment used. Those ages 40 to 49 are significantly more likely to report the use of OTC medications than those age 50-plus (61% vs. 49%).

Top treatments used and effectiveness rating among those with at least one sleep-related problem



	% used	% rated effective
Professional treatment (n=530)		
Prescription medication	52%	80
General consultation	36	43
CPAP machine for sleep apnea	32	59
Non-professional treatment (n=669)		
Over-the-counter medicine	52	63
Herbs/supplements	35	68
Special bedding	32	85



Why have not sought professional help with sleep problem...

"It's nothing that I ever brought up because I never looked at it as a problem."

(Male, 56)

Misinformation and erroneous opinions may contribute to poor sleep experiences for some.

When asked about opinions on various topics related to sleep, the majority of adults age 40-plus are able to correctly identify false statements. Still, in some instances, one in five or more were misinformed. This is especially the case when it comes to attitudes about sleep for older people. According to the CDC all adults age 18-plus need at least 7 hours of sleep¹. However, over a third of adults age 40-plus believe you need less sleep when you turn 65. Also, two in five (41%) believe poor sleep is a normal part of aging—it's not.²

The good news is the vast majority of adults age 40-plus are at least aware of the relationship between physical and mental health and sleep. Only one about one in 10 do not believe poor sleep can negatively affect your physical health (9%) and/or mental health (8%).

Statements on Sleep – Percentage Incorrect



56% If you are having trouble falling asleep, stay in bed until you can

41% Poor sleep is a normal part of aging

36% Adults ages 65 and older need less sleep than younger adults

34% Your body gets used to lack of sleep

22% Snoring is harmless

18% Alcohol before bed improves sleep



9% Poor sleep can negatively affect your physical health

8% Poor sleep can negatively affect your mental health

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about/index.html#cdreference_3

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5841578/#:~:text=Circadian%20system%20and%20sleep%20homeostasis,sleep%20problems%20in%20older%20adults.>

If you got good quality sleep...

"I think you'd feel physically and mentally better... It would improve your quality of life and you'd feel much more satisfied."

(Male, 56+)



Those age 65-plus are most likely to employ recommended healthy sleep routines to help with sleep quality.

Participants were asked to indicate how many of the 14 healthy sleep habits³ they employ. The most common healthy sleep habits utilized were maintaining a cool bedroom temperature (62%) and avoiding consuming caffeine in the afternoon or evening (47%). One in 10 (9%) said they do not employ any of the habits measured. Adults age 65-plus are significantly more likely than those in the other age cohorts to say they avoid caffeine in the evening, go to bed the same time, and set a bedtime early enough to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep. Additionally, those age 65-plus were significantly more likely than those in any other age cohorts to say they employ seven or more of the healthy sleep habits measured.

Adults age 65-plus are significantly more likely than those in any other age cohort to say they employ seven or more of the 14 healthy sleep habits measured.

Top healthy sleep habits employed by age group				
	Total	40-49	50-64	65+
Maintaining a cool bedroom temperature	62	56	64	63
Avoiding consuming caffeine in the afternoon or evening	47	40	45	54
Ensuring the bedroom is completely dark	43	46	43	40
Using the bed only for sleep and sex	36	37	35	38
Going to bed at the same time every night (within 15 minutes), even on weekends or during vacations	35	26	31	46
Setting a bedtime that is early enough to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep	33	29	29	39
Maintaining a healthy diet	32	25	32	38

³ <https://sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits/>

Implications

Nearly all adults age 40-plus acknowledge the importance of sleep as it relates to health generally, but many are needlessly experiencing poor sleep quality and downplaying its seriousness. For adults 40-plus with sleep difficulties, greater awareness is needed on the topic of sleep disorders in general. For example, many middle-aged and older adults believe poor sleep is a normal part of aging.

While over half of adults 40-plus say sleep quality is a topic discussed with their primary healthcare provider, most with sleep-related issues have not sought professional help. Treating sleep-related challenges does not have a one-size-fits-all solution. Proper management will likely include a combination of both professional and non-professional solutions. For example, the smaller subgroup who has sought professional help have found the remedies to be at least somewhat effective. Similarly, adults 40-plus with sleep-related issues who have sought relief through non-professional means (i.e., OTC medications and special bedding) have also found a few remedies provide some relief.

Fundamentally, all middle-aged and older adults could benefit from a greater awareness of and emphasis on healthy sleep habits for higher quality sleep. For instance, only about six in 10 say they knowingly maintain a cool bedroom temperature—the most common habit employed. However, less than two in five employ even half of the recommended healthy sleep habits measured.

Awareness and treatment are fundamental to ensuring adults 40-plus maintain or acquire restorative sleep. This study highlights the importance of outreach and education in this area.

Additional information, articles, and resources from AARP

[2024 Healthy Living Theme Month: A Look A Sleep study page](#)

AARP Sleep Resource page: www.aarp.org/sleep

[Sleep and Brain Health](#)

Methodology

The 2024 Healthy Living Theme Month: A Look A Sleep survey was conducted online from April 3 thru April 18, 2024, with a total sample of 1,610 adults age 40-plus (including oversamples of African American/Black (n = 428); Hispanic/Latino (n = 417). This national survey was conducted using NORC at the University of Chicago's Foresight 50+® Panel and NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel probability-based samples. Chicago's Foresight 50+® Panel and NORC's AmeriSpeak are designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. All data are weighted by age, gender, and race according to the most recent Census population statistics. The margin of error for the national sample is $\pm 3.67\%$.



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