



Sleeplessness

Assessing Sleep Need in Society Today

Jim Horne

9th September

£20.99 | \$33 | Paperback | 978-3-319-32791-4

For years we've been warned that if we don't get at least 8 hours of sleep per night we will suffer for it. But what if we don't all need – and never have needed – that much sleep, and this myth is causing us more harm than good?

[*Sleeplessness*](#) by Jim Horne critically evaluates the popular notion that today's society is suffering from 'sleep debt', or what Horne calls 'societal insomnia' – an apparent chronic loss of sleep which can seemingly lead to obesity and related physical and mental disorders including heart disease and depression.

Horne, a sleep neuroscientist who set up and until recently ran the Loughborough Sleep Research Centre, presents evidence which controversially suggests that sleep debt has not in fact worsened to any marked extent over the last hundred or so years. The book looks back at historical writings on sleeplessness and integrates these findings with recent evidence-based research.

Some key points Horne makes include:

- Links between sleep debt and obesity, diabetes and heart disease are often overstated and do not point to sleep debt as a major cause, especially as the link is only really seen in people who regularly sleep fewer than five hours a night – affecting only a minority of the population.
- Our striving for an unbroken night's sleep, as is the modern custom, is a relatively recent habit and might even be somewhat unnatural. We also shouldn't judge sleep simply by its duration as this overlooks its quality, which is critical.
- Just as with eating or drinking, we can sleep more than we need to, for gratification or out of boredom, reflecting an 'appetite for sleep' rather than an actual sleep need.
- Feeling 'tired' is not the same as sleepiness, and the most common form of insomnia is 'overwakefulness' rather than a lack of sleep – which can be treated through better dealing with the stresses of the waking day rather than focusing on more sleep.
- REM sleep may well help regulate appetite, not only acting as an appetite suppressant but possibly even affecting our desirability of certain foods.
- A pair of walking shoes and a sense of exploration are the best medicine for the ageing brain and its sleep.

Sleeplessness explores how much sleep we need and what it is for, offering a reassuring perspective on common beliefs concerning our apparent lack of sleep. This book helps cut through the anxiety-inducing messages about modern-day 'sleep debt' and provides constructive insights into insomnia for individuals and society as a whole.

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About the Author

Jim Horne is Emeritus Professor of Psychophysiology at Loughborough University, UK. He is a sleep neuroscientist who set up and until recently ran the Loughborough Sleep Research Centre. He is well known internationally for his research on sleep and was the editor of the *Journal of Sleep Research* for

15 years. Apart from his numerous research papers, he has written articles about sleep in the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *New Scientist*, and *The Telegraph*.

You can find out more about Jim Horne on his website: jimhorne.co.uk

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