

refuse to snooze

A report by Mental Health and Neuroscience expert, Matt Janes and Co-Director of the Sleep Lab at Goldsmiths Psychology Department, Michael Banissy, commissioned by eve sleep, into the damage the snooze alarm is causing to the British Public.



foreword by eve sleep CEO, James Sturrock

“At eve, we believe everybody deserves a perfect start to their day thanks to a great night’s sleep. We realise that it can take more than a range of sleep wellness products to leave you feeling refreshed when you wake. We recognised the negative impact the snooze button was having on mornings across the nation, so we’ve commissioned mental health and neuroscience expert, Matt Janes, and Co-Director of the Sleep Lab at Goldsmiths Psychology Department, Michael Banissy, to uncover the impact of the snooze button.

“Within this report, we reveal the snoozing habits of Brits as well as bringing to light the snooze alarm’s detrimental effect on our mental and physical wellbeing. The findings also emphasise the importance of going back to basics and understanding what is needed for a good quality sleep - something that almost half of Brits (49 per cent) aren’t getting.”

introduction

Results from research conducted by eve sleep into 'snoozing' habits revealed that over half of Brits use an alarm to wake up in the morning - with 82% hitting 'snooze' at least once. In fact, we have become so dependent that only a third of people would ditch the snooze button if it was proven to be bad for their health.

To explore the effects of the snooze button, eve sleep commissioned Psychologist, Michael Banissy, and Neuroscientist, Matt Janes. In this report, they explain what it's doing to the nation's mental and physical health.

refuse to snooze

“The importance of good quality sleep on our mental abilities (our cognition) are widespread”, says Banissy (Professor of Psychology and Human Brain Research). “Both short-term and regular episodes of getting less than 7 hours of sleep has been shown to impair mental performance(1). Reductions in a variety of skills have been reported, including attention, general alertness, and short-term memory(2).”

“There is a risk that these drops in performance after reduced sleep could be made worse by snoozing”, Banissy continues. “When we sleep we move between different phases – something known as a sleep cycle. Different psychological consequences can occur depending on the phase of sleep where we wake up. For instance, when waking up in an early phase of sleep known as slow-wave sleep, there is an increased risk of experiencing grogginess afterwards (3). Grogginess after waking has been linked with reduced mental performance, particularly in relation to alertness and sustained attention(4). When snoozing, there is a risk that people who are not getting enough sleep, may be more likely to fall back into the beginning of a sleep cycle - waking up from this could increase the chance of impaired performance.”

“Another important factor linking sleep and psychological function is the regularity of sleep patterns (having a regular time to bed and time to wake up)”, adds Banissy. “More regular sleep patterns have been associated with better academic performance (5). Also, consistent sleepers (those who sleep for regular 7 to 8 hour periods) have been shown to have better mood than inconsistent sleepers (6). One implication of these findings is that regular sleep patterns may be more beneficial for mental performance and wellbeing than disjointed sleep patterns. Taking this a step further, it might be argued that rather than snoozing for varied amounts across different days, it may be more beneficial to gain regular undisturbed sleep at a consistent rate.”, says Banissy.

As well as affecting mood, sleep can affect many other aspects of mental health. “The UK is snoozing its way through a mental health crisis. We must wake up, now!” says Janes (Mental Health and Neuroscience expert). Nearly half of UK adults say they’ve had a diagnosable mental health condition at some point in their lives(7). In 2018, over 70 million prescriptions were dispensed for antidepressants, which is almost double the 36 million dispensed a decade ago in 2008(8) and at the last count, in 2013, there were 8.2 million reported cases of anxiety(9).

“Modern lifestyles have created unprecedented levels of stress”, says Janes. “Our brain and body cannot cope with the assault and they’re breaking.” Right from the beginning of the day, the damage begins. Your alarm goes off. Bang. You’re awoken suddenly from your sleep, typically without having secured the recommended 8 hours(10). You hit snooze to sneak more minutes. Then, boom, your alarm goes off again. And so it continues...

If we examine what’s happening to your physiology during this assault, we uncover an answer to the UK’s mental health crisis,” says Janes. “The names of Dr. Weston Price, Dr. Francis Pottenger, Dr. Ernst Gellhorn and Dr. Daniel Funkenstein may not resonate with you like Freud or Jung, but their work, whilst largely ignored for the last 80 years, holds a great secret to the battle against mental illness.”

They discovered that people have genetically determined, and different, physiology, biochemistry, psychology and health profile. “These doctors discovered that people respond differently to stressors, such as being woken by an alarm, and it is determined by their autonomic type.”, Janes continues.

The autonomic nervous system controls all physiological and biochemical processes in your body, such as respiration, cardiovascular function, digestion, endocrine and immune function. It consists of two branches, the sympathetic and parasympathetic, which work together in reciprocity.

“We all fall into one of three autonomic types; sympathetic dominant, parasympathetic dominant or balanced metaboliser.”, says Janes.

“The first of these three groups, the sympathetic dominants, are most at risk from anxiety and agitated depression, and get pushed further out of balance with increased stress load. For this group, pressing the snooze button invites more stress to an already overloaded system. This group has very strong sympathetic nerves and their brains are constantly scanning for potential danger, which is why we see them suffer with anxiety and agitated depression. When their alarm sounds and their sympathetic nerves fire, it pushes them further out of autonomic balance.”, he continues.

“It all begins in an area of the brain called the hypothalamus, just above the brain stem. The posterior hypothalamus controls the sympathetic nerves and this gets lit up by the sounding of your alarm. When you hit snooze, then get awoken again a few minutes later, this area of your brain sends another signal upwards, to your brain’s cortex, as well as downwards, to your heart, lungs and muscles, preparing you for getting out of bed. For sympathetic dominants, this repeated assault can contribute to anxiety.”, says Janes.

The second group, the parasympathetic dominants, also have a diminished capacity to deal with acute stress, since their sympathetic system is already weak. Instead of suffering from anxiety or agitated depression when subjected to repeated stressors, this group suffers from melancholic depression, where getting out of bed in the morning can be a real struggle, regardless of how many times their alarm sounds.

“These findings have been hiding in plain sight, whilst people with mental illness hide under the covers.”, continues Janes. “Take Dr. Ernst Gellhorn, for example, a Professor at the University of Minnesota, he had four hundred papers and eight textbooks published on the subject of autonomic imbalance as the basis of illness. Dr. Francis Pottenger was also in agreement, in his timeless classic, ‘Symptoms of Visceral Disease’, as was Dr. Daniel Funkenstein, in his book ‘Mastery of Stress’.”

All three doctors agreed, the autonomic nervous system is the ultimate regulator of metabolism in the body and when that’s out of balance, you end up with serious problems.

so what can you do about it?

“Just as illness lies in autonomic imbalance, the key to resolving these problems is through regaining autonomic balance.”, states Janes

“Start your day the right way. Go to bed at a time that enables you to have eight hours of good sleep. Get into a habit, so that you wake naturally, without using an alarm. If you must use one, when it wakes you up, don’t hit snooze, it only increases the stress load on your already stressed system.”, he advises.

“I can see where Matt is coming from”, says Banissy. “I agree with the importance of getting good quality and regular sleep. Doing this, and following the guidelines for recommended quantity of sleep, is important.” He adds, “There are many things that you can do to try to get better sleep, including establishing sleep routines, controlling light exposure, and being careful of intake of things like caffeine and alcohol. Other factors to consider for better sleep, include ensuring optimal sleep environments. Having a comfortable bed and keeping room temperatures at a suitable level can also help”, indicates Banissy.

“In addition”, advises Janes, “When you’ve awoken, resist what you usually do, don’t check your phone for new emails, messages and alerts. Seeing an overloaded inbox further stresses your sympathetic nervous system.”

“The work of Dr. Weston Price taught us that nutrition has a profound effect on our autonomic physiology. For example, leafy greens block the sympathetic system, due to their magnesium content, which also gives them their green colour. So, if you’re feeling anxious or agitated, load your plate with broccoli, cabbage and kale. You can achieve the same effect with food supplements. For example, supplemental magnesium inhibits the sympathetic nerves and potassium boosts the parasympathetic system, so by using these two supplements together, you can help balance your autonomic system.”, Janes continues.

“However, if you suffer from melancholic depression, where you have a very low mood and low energy, you can eat good quality, organic red meat which contains lots of phenylalanine and tyrosine, which are the precursors to the sympathetic neurotransmitters norepinephrine and epinephrine, to stimulate your sympathetic nerves. People suffering with melancholic depression should avoid leafy greens, magnesium and potassium, and instead supplement with calcium, which further boosts the sympathetic system to achieve autonomic balance.”, he says.

“Exercise is good for melancholic depression, since this stimulates the sympathetic nerves, whereas yoga and meditation stimulate the parasympathetic nerves, so is good for those suffering from anxiety and agitated depression.”, continues Janes. “Exercise can also have a number of other benefits for both well-being and cognition(11)”, adds Banissy. “It can help to promote restful sleep(12), but it is important to be careful about when we exercise. Exercise can have a short-term outcome of increasing alertness, so while exercise is good overall we need to be careful about engaging in exercise too close to bedtime(2)”, states Banissy.

“I’d recommend that people start their day the right way, then build from there. Firstly, get a good night’s sleep, then refuse to snooze.”, advises Janes.

“Repeatedly hitting the snooze button compounds the amount of stress you’re put under each day, since your sympathetic system is shocked into action every nine minutes. Consider the cumulative effect that this has on your mental health over the course of the days, months and years.”, he continues.

“I’m absolutely delighted that eve sleep has brought this issue from under the covers with their Refuse to Snooze campaign. The UK desperately needs a solution to its mental health crisis and balancing our autonomic physiology could well be the answer.”, concludes Janes.

“I agree that the Refuse to Snooze campaign conveys an important message”, says Banissy. “Sleep influences so many aspects of our lives – health, well-being, and performance. Encouraging attempts to gain better quality and more regular sleep, which follows recommended guidelines, has many positive implications”, concludes Banissy.

about Matt Janes and Michael Banissy

Matt is a mental health expert, with particular focus on stress, anxiety and depression. Building upon his extensive studies in Neuroscience, Psychology & Mental Health, Functional Medicine and Heart Rate Variability, his area of specialisation is the autonomic nervous system and its relationship with mental illness.

In 2018, Matt published Thrive, a free online course (thethrivedcourse.com) which teaches you the science of stress, anxiety and depression, plus practices of how to achieve and retain mental fitness by regulating the autonomic nervous system. He has also published a course on Burnout.

As well as helping individuals to achieve mental health, Matt teaches leaders and organisations how to achieve their potential through a series of mental hygiene interventions.

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Michael Banissy is an award-winning Professor in Psychology, with a specialism in Cognitive Neuroscience (the study of brain-behaviour interactions). He has contributed to several diverse research areas. These include publications on empathy, emotion perception, mood, memory, and creativity. Recently he has begun working on the relationship between sleep and cognition. The breadth of his work is not only seen in scientific contributions, but also in his engagement to bring science to the public and industry. For instance, running workshops around how sleep can influence performance at work.

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about eve sleep

eve believes that every great day starts the night before. Founded in London, eve's ambition is to re-energise the tired sleep industry by offering a more convenient, customer-first service and superior products that don't compromise quality for the price.

www.evesleep.co.uk

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