

# Sleep Science Plagued by Hype, Contradiction



By Alex Berezow, PhD — July 11, 2017



Credit: Shutterstock [1]

Nutrition science is notoriously unreliable. The reason is because a substantial proportion of research in the field is conducted using surveys, and people just aren't very good at remembering what and how much they ate.

The field is further damaged by a sensationalist press, which breathlessly reports every study and converts minor findings into flashy, eye-catching headlines. The latest example of this is a study that linked increased coffee consumption to reduced mortality. In general, media outlets wrote headlines like, "Drinking coffee may reduce the risk of death."

Well, not exactly. A plethora of data shows that coffee probably has some health benefits. However, after reading the original paper, carefully examining the data, and applying a dose of common sense ([all of which we did](#) [2]), headlines should probably have said, "Coffee is consistent with a healthy lifestyle." That's far more accurate but definitely not exciting, so nobody wrote that headline.

## Sleep Kills

Sleep studies suffer from a similar problem. Consider the latest study to make the press. Here's how [Business Insider](#) [3] covered it:

# Not getting enough sleep could increase your risk of dementia



Kevin Loria     
🕒 5h 🔥 1,278

Okay, so we should all decrease our risk of dementia by getting plenty of sleep, right? Well, no, that's bad too. [Reader's Digest](#) [4] warns us:

## Wake Up! Too Much Sleep Can Increase Your Risk of Dementia, Study Says

Stick to the recommended 7 to 8 hours a night, please.

BY [CLAIRE NOWAK](#)

And just in case you aren't yet afraid of your bed giving you dementia, Harvard (yes, that Harvard) ran this [headline](#) [5]:

*Harvard Women's Health Watch*

## Too little — or too much — sleep linked to dementia risk

Alright, then. Maybe sleep is sort of like a vitamin. We don't want too much or too little. So, let's stick to the 8 hours that doctors commonly recommend, right?

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## Getting 8 Hours of Sleep Might Actually Be Bad for You



BY VICTORIA DAWSON HOFF JUL 23, 2014

2.3k



Thanks, [Elle](#) [6].

### What's the Skinny on Sleep?

To be fair, many outlets (even the ones with sketchy headlines) get some of the science correct by mentioning all the proper caveats usually associated with sleep studies, such as correlation not necessarily equating to causation. But clearly, there is plenty of misinformation out there. What's *really* going on?

Most likely, too much or too little sleep is not causing health problems, but is rather an indicator of

them\*. It is easy to imagine that the same molecular changes that occur in the brain that lead to dementia are also responsible for disturbances in sleep behavior. In some people, that might manifest as too much sleep; in others, too little sleep.

So, how many hours should you sleep? It depends on you. If you feel fine on 6 hours of sleep, do that. If you need 9 hours to function properly, do that. It is highly unlikely that a single sleep recommendation can be made for all people.

The bottom line is that if you feel tired, your body is telling you something. Listen to it, rather than the media.

*\*Note: Obviously, sleep deprivation would be a cause of health problems.*

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[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2017/07/11/latest-coffee-study-being-hyped-11538>

[3] <http://www.businessinsider.com/bad-sleep-increased-alzheimers-dementia-risk-2017-7>

[4] <http://www.rd.com/health/conditions/dementia-sleeping-risk/>

[5] <http://www.health.harvard.edu/sleep/too-little-or-too-much-sleep-linked-to-dementia-risk>

[6] <http://www.elle.com/beauty/health-fitness/news/a15418/getting-8-hours-of-sleep-is-actually-bad-for-you/>