

Go to bed! Brain researchers warn that lack of sleep is a public health crisis.

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In the [screen-lit bustle](#) of modern life, sleep is expendable. There are television shows to binge-watch, work emails to answer, homework to finish, social media posts to scroll through. We'll catch up on shut-eye later, so the thinking goes — right after we click down one last digital rabbit hole.

Brain research, which has pushed back hard against this nonchalant attitude, is now expanding rapidly, reaching beyond the laboratory and delving into exactly how sleep works in disease and in normal cognitive functions such as memory. The growing consensus is that casual disregard for sleep is wrongheaded — even downright dangerous.

Preschoolers who [skip naps](#) are worse at a memory game than those who snooze, even after the children “catch up” on sleep the next night. An alarming new line of research suggests poor sleep may increase the risk of Alzheimer's, as even a single night of sleep deprivation boosts brain levels of the [proteins that form toxic clumps in Alzheimer's patients](#). All-nighters [push anxiety](#) to clinical levels, and even [modest sleep reductions](#) are linked to increased feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

“A lot of medical approaches have ignored sleep,” said Ken Paller, a cognitive neuroscientist at Northwestern University. “People think about [poor sleep] as one of the complaints someone with depression or other disorders might have, rather than a critical part of the whole etiology of the disease, which is a new idea.”