Hitting the snooze button? You're far from alone, study shows

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A study by researchers at the University of Notre Dame is painting a

clearer picture of our tendency to hit the snooze button—and if you delayed getting out of bed this morning, you're certainly not alone.

The study, published in the journal *Sleep*, found that 57% of the participants were habitual snoozers. While scientists and medical professionals have long advised against it, the act of snoozing—how often and why we do it—remains virtually unstudied.

"Most of what we know about snoozing is taken from data on sleep, stress or related behaviors," said Stephen Mattingly, lead author of the study who conducted the research while a postdoctoral researcher at Notre Dame, with Aaron Striegel, professor of computer science and engineering at Notre Dame. "Alarm clocks, smartphones, they all have snooze buttons. The medical establishment is generally against the use of snoozing, but when we went to look at what hard data existed, there was none. We now have the data to prove just how common it is—and there is still so much that we do not know."

The Centers for Disease Control estimates 1 in 3 Americans do not get enough sleep. The findings of the study suggest snoozing may be how some battle their exhaustion.

"So many people are snoozing because so many people are chronically tired," Mattingly said. "If only 1 in 3 people are sleeping adequately, that means a lot of us are turning to other means to manage fatigue."

The study surveyed 450 adults with full-time, salaried employment. Participants completed daily surveys and a questionnaire. Data collected from wearable devices measured sleep duration and heart rate. According to the study, females were 50% more likely to snooze than males. Snoozers tracked fewer steps than other respondents and experienced more disturbances during sleeping hours.

"These are people who have been in the workforce for years, white-collar workers with advanced degrees—and 57% of them are snoozing," Mattingly said. "Critically, these statistics are only representative of a small population that is likely to be in the best position with respect to sleep habits. We have no idea about various age groups such as teenagers, lower-income households or any of the populations that are historically more sleep deprived than the respondents of this study. So, the odds are this is probably a conservative estimate of the wider population."

The study also considered each respondent's chronotype, or when they prefer to go to bed and wake up. Night owls were found to snooze more and were found to be more tired in general. "In the 9 to 5 world," Mattingly said, "night owls are losing."

"Part of the focus of this study was to demystify what is happening with snoozing," Striegel said. "Is it really worse than waking up to an alarm on the first ring—is it that much different? The recommendation against an alarm is well-founded, but as far as we can tell from the physiology and our data, waking to one alarm or hitting the snooze button and waking to two or three alarms doesn't make much of a difference. If you need an alarm because you're sleep-deprived—that's the issue."

When respondents woke naturally, without the aid of an alarm, they slept longer and consumed less caffeine. Snoozers and non-snoozers are getting the same amount of sleep. Snoozers aren't taking more naps and they do not report feeling tired more often.

"When we are able to sleep as long as we want," Mattingly said, "the body experiences a stress response right before waking. That physiological response contributes to an individual feeling alert when they wake up."

Disrupting natural sleep cycles with an alarm can lead to sleep inertia—the feeling of being tired or groggy. "When you wake up from a REM sleep state," said Mattingly, "your brain is most of the way to being fully awake. Hormone levels circulating at that stage are going to be different than when you're in a deep sleep."

Waking up to an alarm is sort of like a double whammy, bypassing the natural stress response needed to feel alert and waking you up with brain chemistry that's out of whack.

Both Striegel and Mattingly say more research is needed to understand any potential negative health impacts of snoozing, and Mattingly emphasized that the best advice is for everyone to sleep as much as their body needs.

Still, snoozing may have its benefits.

"If you snooze and you're more alert when you get behind the wheel to go to work, that might be a benefit and a useful one," he said. "If it reduces dependence on caffeine, that's another. It's not uniformly bad—similar to stress. Some stress is good—that's why we have the fight or flight response. There are times and places for it. There may be cases when hitting the snooze button is actually beneficial."

More information: Stephen M Mattingly et al, Snoozing: an examination of a common method of waking, *Sleep* (2022). DOI: 10.1093/sleep/zsac184

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