

- Sleep disorder

Daytime fatigue sleep disorder could be affecting millions

If you find yourself feeling sleepy throughout the day, a not-so-rare sleep disorder could be to blame

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A condition causing fatigue could be more prevalent than we thought



Despite a good night's sleep, many people still find themselves feeling drowsy and fatigued throughout the day. According to a study published in December, this could be explained by a sleep disorder that might be more common than previously thought.

Idiopathic hypersomnia is a neurological disorder that can cause people to feel very tired during the day, sleep for excessive periods of time, have difficulty waking up and even wake up disorientated.

While similar in nature, idiopathic hypersomnia is different to the more common narcolepsy. Narcolepsy can also cause people to feel tired throughout the day, but sufferers tend not to sleep excessively and can wake up feeling refreshed from naps.

“It has been difficult to determine the prevalence of idiopathic hypersomnia because expensive and time-consuming sleep testing is required to make a diagnosis,” said the study's author Dr David T Plante, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US.

“We examined data from a large sleep study and found that this condition is much more common than previous estimates, and as prevalent as some other common neurologic and psychiatric conditions such as epilepsy, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.”

The researchers behind the study analysed sleep data collected from 792 people with an average age of 59.

Every participant had to complete an overnight sleep study, as well as a daytime nap study, measuring how fast they fell asleep.

The participants were surveyed further on daytime sleepiness, fatigue, the amount of time spent napping and how many hours of sleep they get on a worknight and non-worknight.

In the surveys that measured sleepiness, a score range was set up between 0 and 24. Questions included how likely a person is to nod off while sitting, talking and while stopped in a car. On average, people with idiopathic hypersomnia had a score of 14, while those without averaged nine. Anything over 10 was deemed concerning.

With the results of the tests, the researchers were able to determine that 12 people had probable cases of idiopathic hypersomnia. This indicates a prevalence of 1.5 per cent in the wider population.

The study only assessed employed people, however. So the researchers note that the true prevalence of idiopathic hypersomnia could be even higher if the unemployed population were to be included.