How Much Sleep Do You Really Need for Longevity? The New Data Is Sharper Than Ever

3 MIN READ

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New research reveals the exact sleep range that supports longevity and why sleep efficiency may matter even more than hours in bed.

If you care about healthspan, deep, efficient sleep is non-negotiable. It sits in the same category as exercise and diet for predicting how long and how well you live. Two recently published major studies sharpen the picture, revealing how much sleep you really need, why quality matters as much as quantity, and how sleep sets up your capacity to move your body the next day.

Here's what's new:

- A **study of 3,143 U.S**. counties found that communities where more people slept less than 7 hours a night had *significantly shorter life expectancies*.
- A **second study** analyzing 28 million person-days of real-world tracking data revealed that sleep quality predicts next-day physical activity far more than exercise predicts sleep.
- The same dataset showed that sleep efficiency (think time sleep without disruptions), not just hours, was one of the strongest predictors of next-day movement.
- Together, these studies show that both insufficient sleep and inefficient sleep directly undermine cardiovascular longevity, metabolic health, energy, and daily performance.

What New Research Shows About

Sleep and Longevity

The latest study to land in ***SLEEP Advances*** looked at every one of the 3,143 counties in the United States between 2019 and 2025. Researchers combined CDC survey data on sleep duration with county-level life expectancy and common health behaviors like smoking, physical inactivity, food insecurity, unemployment, and education.

They found a clear pattern. In almost every state, counties where a higher share of people slept less than 7 hours a night had shorter life expectancy. That link held steady year after year from 2019 through 2025. Even after the model adjusted for smoking, inactivity, food access, insurance, and social connection, insufficient sleep remained a strong and independent predictor of how long people live. Only smoking showed a stronger association with lower life expectancy.

When the researchers added obesity and diabetes into the model, sleep still mattered. Short sleep was nearly as powerful as obesity and only slightly weaker than smoking in its relationship with life expectancy. In other words, at a population level, sleeping less than 7 hours a night is a mortality risk factor.

- **People who sleep less than 7 hours have a shorter life expectancy**
- **people who** *habitually* **sleep more than 8 hours a night (roughly 9+ hours) have a higher risk of all-cause mortality**.

How Tonight's Sleep Predicts Tomorrow's Movement

A second 2025 study, published in ***Communications Medicine***, took a real-world look at how sleep and movement work together using an extraordinary dataset: 28 million person-days of objective data from an under-mattress sleep sensor and a wrist-worn health tracker. The question was simple and practical: *In everyday life, how does the way we sleep shape the way we move and vice versa?*

Two insights rise to the top for anyone focused on healthspan. First, only 12.9% of people regularly hit the sweet spot of both solid sleep (7–9 hours) *and* meaningful daily movement (8,000+ steps). Second, sleep drives next-day physical activity far more than activity influences that night's sleep.

The details are fascinating. After accounting for actual time awake, next-day steps peaked when people slept around 6–7 hours. But sleep efficiency, which is how much of your time in bed you spend really sleeping, was the standout. The higher your efficiency, the more you move the next day, almost in a straight line.

In other words, if you want more strength, stamina, and metabolic power tomorrow, start with your sleep tonight. High-quality, efficient sleep reliably expands your capacity for exercise.

Why Sleep Efficiency May Matter More Than Hours in Bed

Most of us fixate on "hours in bed." This new study suggests another metric may matter just as much: sleep efficiency.

Sleep efficiency is the percentage of time in bed that you actually spend asleep. And here's the striking part: in the global dataset of 28 million nights, moving from "fair" sleep efficiency (around the 25th percentile) to "strong" sleep efficiency (around the 75th) translated to roughly 200 extra steps the next day, even after adjusting for how long people were awake.

Why does that matter for healthspan? Because high efficiency is a proxy for what your body does *inside* your sleep window. It usually means:

- **More deep and REM sleep**, the phases responsible for metabolic reset, cardiovascular repair, and memory consolidation.

- **Smoother autonomic function**, with fewer stress-triggered awakenings and better overnight recovery.
- **Lower inflammatory load and more stable blood pressure**, two major predictors of long-term health.

Over time, this adds up. Better sleep efficiency means more energy, more metabolic flexibility, and more capacity for the movement and strength training that keep your brain sharp and your body resilient as you age. It's one of the quietest, most powerful longevity metrics, and one you can influence starting today.

How to Update Your Sleep Routine to Support Longevity

You do not need a lab to apply this research. You do need a **repeatable sleep routine**.

1. Set your sleep range
The longevity sweet spot for most adults is 7–8 hours a night. Don't obsess over single-night fluctuations, look at your *weekly average*. If you track your sleep, use that trend line to gently guide your habits toward this range.

2. Prioritize sleep efficiency, not just hours.
Use a tracker to determine your sleep efficiency. If efficiency dips below 85 percent, consider it an early signal that something's interrupting your sleep. Focus on what is waking you up: nighttime scrolling, alcohol, late heavy meals, an overly warm bedroom, untreated snoring or apnea.

3. Protect the basics that improve efficiency.

- Keep a consistent sleep and wake time, even on weekends.
- Get outside light within 30–60 minutes of waking to anchor your **circadian rhythm**.

- Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet.
- Avoid caffeine after early afternoon and keep alcohol light and early.

4. Treat sleep as the foundation for your movement practice.
If you want to walk 8,000 steps or lift heavy three times a week in your 60s and 70s, start by protecting your 7–8 hours. The data is clear: your capacity to move tomorrow depends more on tonight's sleep than your sleep depends on today's workout.

5. Get help if you need it.
Loud snoring, gasping, or waking up exhausted despite a long sleep window are all reasons to talk with a clinician about sleep apnea or other sleep disorders. Addressing those can dramatically improve both efficiency and healthspan.

The science is unmistakable: sleep is a core longevity practice with measurable, compounding impact. At the population level, insufficient sleep tracks with shorter life expectancy almost as strongly as smoking. At the individual level, it shapes your cardiovascular risk, metabolic resilience, and even how much you're able to move the next day.

If you're looking for one habit that pays off quietly but powerfully over decades, start here: protect your 7–8 hours, improve your sleep efficiency, and treat nighttime recovery as the foundation of your strength, clarity, and vitality for the years ahead.

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