Medizinische Universität Graz

Rector's Office
Auenbruggerplatz 2, A-8036 Graz

Thomas Edlinger, BA
Public relations and event management

thomas.edlinger@medunigraz.at
Tel +43 / 316 / 385-72055
Fax +43 / 316 / 385-72030

Press release
For immediate publication

COVID-19: Poor Sleep During Lockdown

Med Uni Graz researchers investigate the consequences of the lockdowns

Sleep is one of the most basic functions of our body: Regeneration, development of synapses, cell growth and learning processes occur while we are wandering in the "realm of dreams." Yet there are several factors that can negatively impact our sleep. Nearly two years after the first lockdown of the Corona pandemic in March 2020, Graz scientists have provided an initial insight into how the measures have affected our sleep. Frederike Fellendorf of Med Uni Graz has examined the effects of the lockdown on the sleep quality of people with bipolar affective disorder.

Healthy sleep, healthy person

Nothing works without sleep: If the body does not have regular breaks during which it can recover from the efforts of the day, both it and the psyche suffer. Many external factors can have an impact on the length and quality of sleep, and one of them affected everyone: the lockdowns as a result of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The Med Uni Graz Division of Psychiatry and Psychotherapeutic Medicine has conducted a study on how sleep behavior changed during the first hard lockdown in spring 2020 and the loosening of restrictions in May. To draw comparisons, people with bipolar affective disorder were compared to a healthy control group that also reported on their psychological well-being and sleep quality in April and May.

Restlessness during the pandemic

The study discovered that people with bipolar affective disorder had poorer sleep quality than mentally healthy individuals during the "hard lockdown" as well as after the initial loosening of restrictions in May 2020. There were a variety of reasons why people with bipolar disorder slept worse. The main factors connected with poor sleep that surfaced over the course of the study were how frequently individuals paid attention to developments regarding the pandemic and the virus and how much they feared that they or other people would become infected with the virus.

Individuals with bipolar disorder paid attention to new information about the events and the virus significantly more often than healthy individuals did. Among the study participants, people who paid more attention to the virus slept worse. Similarly, sleep quality improved as the pandemic progressed and the frequency of information gradually declined. For individuals subject to greater frequency of information and increased fear during the hard lockdown, however, worse sleep quality was also predicted for the time when the restrictions were loosened.

Relevance of the findings

"Since the current pandemic may represent a possible trigger for repeated depressive or manic disease episodes, it is particularly important to pay attention to factors that can be

influenced such as lifestyle. Healthy sleep is immensely important for people with bipolar disease in order to prevent further disease episodes," says Frederike Fellendorf. With the findings of this study, the researchers appeal for responsible handling of information on the current pandemic, especially for individuals who belong to vulnerable groups such as those with bipolar disorder. "In addition, psychosocial treatment should address specific fears in order to support people with bipolar disorder and equally to positively influence their sleep," concludes Frederike Fellendorf.

The publication is available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8420206/

Contact person and further information:

Frederike Fellendorf
Medical University of Graz
Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapeutic Medicine
Tel.: +43 680 3223559
frederike.fellendorf@medunigraz.at

Profile: Frederike Fellendorf

Frederike Fellendorf completed her studies of medicine at Med Uni Graz and then gained extensive clinical and scientific experience with bipolar affective disorder during her specialist training. Her main interest is in the investigation of neurobiological backgrounds and lifestyle aspects such as physical activity, nutrition and sleep.