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Lack of sleep can lead to early death

JOHN VON RADOWITZ

SLEEPING fewer than six hours a night increases the risk of early death, scientists have claimed.

Experts arrived at the result after analysing data from 16 studies involving more than a million participants.

They found "unequivocal evidence" of a direct link between sleeping fewer than six hours a night and dying prematurely.

People who regularly had this little sleep were 12 per cent more likely to die over a period of 25 years or less than those who got the recommended six to eight hours.

An association was also seen between sleeping more than nine hours a night and early death. This was thought to be due to long-sleeping being a marker of serious underlying illness rather than any effect of sleep itself.

Professor Francesco Cappuccio, head of the Sleep, Health and Society Programme at the University of Warwick, said: "While short sleep may represent a

cause of ill-health, long sleep is believed to represent more an indicator of ill-health.

"Modern society has seen a gradual reduction in the average amount of sleep people take, and this pattern is more common among full-time workers, suggesting that it may be due to societal pressures for longer working hours and more shift-work. On the other hand, the deterioration of our health status is often accompanied by an extension of our sleeping time."

The research, reported in the journal *Sleep*, reviewed prospective studies from the UK, US, Europe and Asia which together monitored more than 1.3 people for up to 25 years. In total, more than 100,000 deaths were recorded. Pooling data in this way can indicate patterns and trends that may not be obvious in individual studies.

Prof Cappuccio, who worked with colleagues from the Federico II University Medical School in Naples, Italy, added: "Consistently sleeping six to eight hours per night may be optimal for health."