

Does Commuting Raise Blood Pressure and Cause Sleep Deprivation?

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Large numbers of Americans have to endure long commutes to get to work and suffer sleep deprivation as a consequence. A survey of more than 4,000 commuters on the Long Island Railroad, the country's largest rail line, asked commuters about their sleep habits and general health. More than half of them reported sleep problems, which included difficulty getting to sleep at night, napping on the train and excessive sleepiness during the day. These problems were worse in people who had long commutes (more than 75 minutes) than in those with short commutes (less than 45 minutes).

Nearly half of the respondents reported that they snored. These people were likely to be overweight, and were also more likely to have hypertension than those who did not snore. Hypertension was also commoner in those who had symptoms suggestive of sleep apnea (interruptions of sleep and breathing during the night). People who had a long commute were 70% more likely to report that they had hypertension than those with a short commute.

Doctor's Comments

This survey shows that sleep deprivation is pervasive among commuters. The finding that people who commute more than 75 minutes to get to work are more likely to have hypertension is intriguing, and raises the possibility that the stress and sleep deprivation of commuting act to raise the blood pressure. The relationship between obesity, snoring and hypertension has been described in other studies.

Source: *JA Walsleben and colleagues. Sleep habits of Long Island Rail Road commuters. Sleep 1999; 22:628.*