

# Sleep Problems

A new report says an estimated fifty million to seventy million Americans have sleep problems. It says many more are suffering from lack of sleep.

A group of sleep research organizations asked the Institute of Medicine to study the problem. The institute is part of America's National Academy of Sciences. The study examined why we need sleep, the effect of sleep loss and other sleep disorders. A fourteen-member committee carried out the study. The Institute of Medicine reported their findings earlier this month.

The report says **too few** researchers are studying sleep disorders. It also

says **too few** health care workers are trained to **identify and treat** the problem. American businesses lose more than **one hundred thousand million** dollars a year because of tired workers. Some employees are too tired to **report for work**. They have accidents or are less productive at work. **Other costs included increased visits to doctors.**

The study found that twenty percent of injuries caused by serious car accidents are linked to sleepy drivers. Alcoholic drinks were not linked to the accidents. Other studies have linked poor sleep to an increased risk of health problems like heart disease, depression and **unhealthy amount of body fat**. Researchers say the reason for this link is unclear.

**Many experts say a good amount of sleep is as important to health as diet and exercise.** They say most people

need seven to nine hours of sleep each night. **Less than that can interfere with mental and physical abilities.** It can lead to more serious problems, including severe sleeplessness. It also can lead to **sleep apnea. People with this condition temporarily stop breathing while they sleep.**

Researchers involved in the study are suggesting a number of steps to help prevent sleep disorders. They suggest a **campaign** to inform the public about the problem. They want increased education and training among health care workers. And they are calling for new technology to identify and cure sleep problems.