

Critical Thinking for Media Articles on Sleep

Use this as a guide to critique media articles on sleep:

Take a media holiday. Abstain from reading any articles about sleep until your insomnia is under control or for at least 2 weeks. See how you feel about sleep and to decide if this is a good practice for you.

If you decide to forgo the media holiday, use these criteria:

1. **Causation or Correlation.** Causation means A causes B. Smoking causes cancer. Correlation means that A and B go up and down together, they are connected by an invisible 3rd cause. More ashtrays in a home is correlated to the rate of cancer. They are both controlled by a 3rd factor - the number of cigarettes smoked in a home.
If the study shows correlation – then it means nothing. Most studies show correlation because it is easy to research. Causation is much rarer and more difficult and expensive to execute, so it is more rare.
2. **Size of the study:** Experiments and studies with few participants – say less than 1,000 – are less expensive and produce more dramatic results. If the study is small – ignore it.
3. **How closely do the study participants resemble you?** It terms of impact of sleep, young people respond differently than the elderly, people with insomnia respond differently than good sleepers. Women may respond differently than men. If they are studying oranges and you are an apple, ignore the findings.
4. **Sleep is of the mind, not the body:** Sleep is primarily a function that benefits the mind, not the body. If the article is trying to convince you that there is a serious health risk by not sleeping well, treat it with high skepticism. It is unlikely that there is a causal relationship.