



**February 9, 2023**

## **Road Map Bulletin: The Links Between Race and the Health Risks of Poor Sleep**

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai Community –

This week, we're exploring an activity that all of us partake in: sleep. Specifically, we're taking a deep dive into the ways in which poor sleep disproportionately undermines the health communities of color.

According to a study on the racial and ethnic differences in sleep disturbances, more [Black and Hispanic people routinely get less than six hours of sleep](#) compared to their white counterparts. Additional studies have shown that, on average, nonwhite people [take longer to fall asleep, wake up more during the night, and spend less time in deep sleep](#)—a stage of sleep important for strengthening the immune system, forming memories, and restoring the health of cells. A chronic lack of restful sleep also puts millions of people who don't have a diagnosed sleep disorder—a [disproportionate number of whom are Black](#)—at higher risk of heart attack, stroke, and death.



Like many of the topics we discuss, sleep is a multi-dimensional issue that requires careful study of socioeconomic, environmental, and medical factors. To better understand sleep disparities, we spoke with **Sonali Bose, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Medicine, Pulmonary, Critical Care, and Sleep Medicine.**

**Q: According to [STAT News](#), the implications of sleep disparities are far-reaching. What are some of the risk factors for poor sleep, particularly for Black Americans?**

**A:** Our understanding of sleep disparities, especially across racial/ethnic populations, is still poor. Emerging studies have highlighted disparities in sleep quantity, quality, and patterns, as well as established sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea, but we have a long way to go. Sleep disparities can be related to social determinants of health, like neighborhood and ecologic environments and access to medical care, leaving some populations at risk of undiagnosed or undertreated diseases. Additionally, high rates of co-morbid conditions that impact sleep health must be factored into our study of sleep disparities within high-risk populations.

**Q: On average, [Black adults in the U.S. get poorer sleep than white adults](#), often for reasons outside of their control. A growing number of experts argue that in order to address such racial disparities, health professionals need to start discussing sleep within the complex tapestry of a person's life and surroundings. What should these discussions look like, and what factors are most relevant to these conversations?**

**A:** Contextualizing sleep is an important part of understanding sleep quality among vulnerable patients. Factors such as employment schedules, air, noise and light pollution, household and co-sleeping arrangements, bedtime behaviors and sleep hygiene, psychosocial stress, and trauma history can affect sleep. Additionally, co-morbid conditions like sleep disorders, anxiety and depression, and medications are essential elements that need to be discussed openly with patients as we continue to gain an understanding of what influences sleep health at the individual level.

**Q: Through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding, you've been looking into the links between race and the health risks of poor sleep. What can you tell us about your studies and what are you hoping to find through this research?**

**A:** Sleep problems are one of the most common health concerns among parents of young children. Adequate sleep is important to normal growth and development, and persistent early childhood sleep problems impact a host of physical, cognitive, and behavioral health outcomes with potential lifelong consequences. Our current R-01-funded research aims to identify early life determinants of sleep disparities among ethnically-diverse populations, including Black and Hispanic communities. As we know that sleep development begins in utero, we hypothesize that exposures to environmental toxins occurring during pregnancy disrupt fetal development of sleep, resulting in altered sleep during childhood in these populations. It is our hope that by identifying early determinants of poor sleep, we may begin to understand how interactions among social and physical environments contribute to childhood sleep disparities.

**Q: Why is this research important and how does it play a role in dismantling structural racism?**

**A:** Structural racism is thought to increase a person's likelihood to experience poor sleep. Several causes like chronic stress, greater [exposure to environmental pollution and hazards](#), commonly associated with [redlining](#), and a heightened sense of alertness due to fear of discrimination, are inextricably linked to instances of racism and discrimination. The NIH recently announced recommendations encouraging researchers to further investigate racism as a driver for these sleep health disparities. It is our hope that dismantling structural racism by identifying and targeting systems that support societal inequalities will, over time, result in less severe sleep health disparities and better overall health.

**Q: Is there anything that *Bulletin* readers can start doing today to form healthier sleep habits?**

**A:** Parents should be aware that many sleep disorders may start very early in life. Early recognition and treatment is essential to prevent the cognitive, behavioral, and financial consequences of poor sleep down the line.

Other sleep hygiene habits such as keeping a consistent sleep schedule, establishing a relaxing bedtime routine, and turning off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime are also recommended to promote healthier sleep.

We also recommend checking out the book, *Rest is Resistance* by Tricia Hersey and the new Modern Museum of Art exhibition, [Black Power Naps](#), open now through April 16, as additional resources on the connection between race and sleep disparities.

To suggest a topic, highlight a coworker, or provide feedback on the Bulletins, send us an email at [RoadMap@mountsinai.org](mailto:RoadMap@mountsinai.org).

All the best,

Angela and Shawn

## Join Us for an Upcoming Event

**New York City Restaurant Week** - Now through Sunday, February 12. Join your colleagues for a night of fine dining at Black-owned restaurants in the city! [Click here](#) for a list of participating restaurants.

**Black History Month Film Series:** Celebrate the month through cinema as we highlight a variety of films and documentaries exploring the civil rights movement, the experiences of individuals with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community at the intersection of race. Click the registration link to view exact room locations for the screenings below. Click [here](#) for the full list of movies this month.

- **Wednesday, February 15 | *Selma*** at Mount Sinai Queens | [Registration Link](#)
- **Thursday, February 16 | *Moonlight*** at Mount Sinai Brooklyn | [Registration Link](#)
- **Tuesday, February 21 | *Just Mercy*** at Mount Sinai West | [Registration Link](#)

**Healing Circle - Wednesday, February 15, noon – 1 pm** | [Registration Link](#)

Spend a few moments meditating on the importance of Black History Month and the struggles Black Americans have overcome while sharing thoughts on how to uplift and support marginalized communities. Zoom link will be provided to those who register prior to the event.

**Chats for Change: Resiliency and Faith in Communities of Color** — Chats for Change is a production of the Icahn School of Medicine's Racism and Bias Initiative." Join facilitators Zorina Costello, D.Min., M.S. and Rev. Amy Strano, MDiv, BCC on Tuesday, February 14 from 12-1 PM to explore answers to the following questions: what does it mean to center the faith of communities of color in racial justice work? How have faith and spirituality provided support and resilience within communities of color? How has faith been a protective factor for communities of color and others in the face of racism and inequity?

[Road Map for Action](#)

[Past Bulletins](#)