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Insomnia linked to increased risk of heart disease and stroke

People who struggle to get a good night's rest may be at greater risk of developing cardiovascular problems, according to new research.

Scientists have found people who are genetically predisposed to [insomnia](#) have a higher risk of [heart failure](#), [stroke](#) and coronary artery disease.

Based on previous research, they discovered frequent links between poor sleep and cardiovascular problems. Their study suggests insomnia could play a role in causing such conditions.

Up to 250 genes have been linked to insomnia. The researchers found these were associated with significantly higher odds of coronary artery disease, heart failure and ischaemic stroke – particularly large artery stroke, but not [atrial fibrillation](#). 1.3 million participants were studied.

"It's important to identify the underlying reason for insomnia and treat it," said Dr Susanna Larsson, lead study author and associate professor of cardiovascular and nutritional epidemiology at Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden. "Sleep is a behaviour that can be changed by new habits and stress management."

However, the study looked at participants who already had a genetic predisposition to insomnia, rather than how much sleep individuals actually managed per night.

Michael Holmes, of the University of Oxford who was not involved in the research, told the [Guardian](#) it was not clear whether sleep loss based on the genetic variants increased the risk of cardiovascular disease, or whether the link was because of genetic variants triggering other effects.

He said: "This study doesn't allow us to conclude that insomnia causes cardiovascular disease. Rather, all we can say is that individuals carrying genetic variants linked to a higher risk of insomnia also have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease."

The research is published in [Circulation](#).

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