NOT FEELING HAPPY?

Australians may live in 'the lucky country', but we would be a whole lot happier if we could just get more sleep, says a leading psychologist.... and those in their thirties and forties should pay particular attention to this advice, being the category most in need of bed rest - and most in need of a happiness boost.

"Sleep deprivation has a huge impact on our happiness levels," says Dr Anthony Grant, who backs up his belief with an online survey he has devised to calculate our happiness score out of 100 depending on a wide range of factors, including sleep.

The Happily Healthy Project, which has already been taken by almost 60,000 Australians, shows an average score of 62.4 for the 56% of Aussies who sleep between seven and eight hours a night, compared to 52.8 for the 36% of us who sleep less than seven hours a night.

The national average is 59.

Those in the 35 to 44 age band are the least content (scoring an average of 56) and, on the whole, the most knackered.

Those above 65 are the happiest segment of society - and, uncoincidentally, probably the best rested.

People in the 35 to 44 age range are often raising young children, but they are also trying to maintain an active social life while establishing solid careers.

These are the reasons why the over 65s are scoring the highest numbers in the Happy Healthy Project, says Dr Grant, with an average score of around 66.

"The older you get the happier you get, with a few ups and downs along the way," says Grant, who is also co-author with Alison Leigh of Eight Steps to Happiness: The Science of Getting Happy.

Grant says our bodies become accustomed to being sleep deprived, which means we don't realise how much our poor shut-eye is affecting our physical and mental health.

While we all go through periods of sleeping well and less well, there are a few signs that suggest poor sleep is affecting your health.

These include waking up a few hours after you've fallen asleep with a resentment or anger about something; feeling like you want to sleep too much in the afternoon; feeling depressed if you don't sleep well for a few nights; relying on sleeping pills or alcohol to relax you in the evening; or falling asleep too quickly - in less than five minutes.

The two things Grant says would make a huge difference to the happiness levels and "ease of sleep" for the average Australian are: helping others and a positive attitude.

"In our consumerist society we think we can purchase happiness but we can't reinvent ourselves through the products we buy," he says.

"We need to think less about going out and buying happiness and more about giving it away."

To determine your happiness score, visit

www.happily-healthy.com.au

Source: AAP and The Sydney Morning Herald

TIPS TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

- Avoid a hot bath or shower before bed as the body needs to cool down before it can sleep.
- Exercise vigorously in the late afternoon or early evening (not just before bed).
- Don't nap too late in the day. A short nap of 10 to 20 minutes during the day, however, can be very beneficial (more than 20 minutes will leave you feeling tired).
- Cut down on alcohol and caffeinated drinks, particularly before bed.
- Only go to bed if you feel sleepy.
- Don't use the computer just before bed; an activity such as reading is more relaxing for the mind.
- Don't eat too late as your body will be busy digesting.
- Maintain a regular sleeping pattern.
- Blank out light and noise pollution (if you can't shut out the noise, wear ear plugs).