

Media Release

Bern, 19 January 2017 / mk

While you were sleeping...

Most people who hurt themselves in a fall and end up in the emergency department can explain what has happened. Unless he or she has injured themselves while asleep. It doesn't happen often – but it's possible, reveals a recent Bernese study.

Sleepwalkers wander around in some sort of trance. Their consciousness hovers somewhere between sleeping and waking. Mostly this is just odd rather than dangerous for the sleepwalker and their surroundings. However, a study at Inselspital's Department of Emergency Medicine now demonstrates that sleepwalkers can actually injure themselves during their nightly ventures.

Even serious injuries are possible

Over 15 years, the Department of Emergency Medicine has identified a total of 620,000 patients treated for injuries, 11 of which had hurt themselves while sleepwalking. They had fallen out of bed, down the stairs, and some had even toppled out of the window. Four patients had to remain in hospital for further investigations due to orthopaedic injuries – two of which were seriously hurt. Only two patients were aware that they sleepwalked. This is the first time data on injuries in this patient group has been systematically recorded from a catchment area of two million people.

The study was published in the "Journal of Western Emergency Medicine". As findings can give emergency staff important indications as to the cause of otherwise unexplained injuries, the study was featured as a top story from the field of emergency medicine in the internationally-renowned information portal for medical professionals, "Medscape".

Preventing injuries through more knowledge on both sides

Lead author Dr. med. Thomas Sauter: "Only a few specialists in emergency care are currently aware of the injuries that can be caused by sleepwalking, which include falls and cuts, among other wounds. Our study will help them to advise those patients at risk, either from certain medication or a natural tendency, on how to avoid injuring themselves during the night."

Two to three percentage of adults sleepwalk. Due to children's central nervous systems not being fully developed, their percentage lies between 15 (up to 6 years) and 11 (6-11 years) percent.

Study online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27833677>

Captions:

[Nightly visit to the emergency department with a broken bone? It could have been sleepwalking. \(Photo: Department of Emergency Medicine, Tanja Läser\).](#)

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