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AACPDM Adapted Sports/Recreation Committee
Journal Article Digest Sub-Committee

Article Title

Sleep and physical activity: the experiences of adults with cerebral palsy and recommendations for clinical practice

Article Citation

van Rijssen, I. M., Gorter, J. W., Visser-Meily, J. M. A., Sommers-Spijkerman, M., Konijnenbelt, M., van Driel, M., & Verschuren, O. (2025). Sleep and physical activity: the experiences of adults with cerebral palsy and recommendations for clinical practice. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 1-9.

Adaptive Sport/Recreation Categories:

- Cerebral palsy
- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Adults
- Qualitative research

Study Type: Qualitative with inductive thematic analysis

Summary: Balancing the 24-hour cycle of physical activities guidelines inclusive of sleep, physical activity (PA) and sedentary behaviour is important for physical and mental wellbeing. Low adherence to the guidelines in adults with cerebral palsy (CP) indicates this remains a challenge. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of adults with CP and factors influencing their sleep and PA. Fourteen adults with CP (age 23-58, thirteen ambulant) participated in semi structured interviews conducted in Dutch by an interviewer unknown to the participants. Thematic analysis was undertaken. Following coding and analysis quotes were translated to English. Team discussions ensured trustworthiness and themes and summaries were member checked with participants.

Three themes were developed: 1. balancing energy, rest and activity, 2. sleep and 3. physical activity. For balancing energy, rest and PA, subthemes were (1) managing personal resources, (2) the interaction between sleep and PA and (3) the presence of appropriate support and resources. Adults with CP reflected on the challenge of finding the right balance to ensure they could complete daily activities, a lack of understanding of others and the vicious cycle of fatigue and other health consequences if balance was not achieved. Adults reported support and information to help achieve balance was lacking. Subthemes for the adult's experiences of and influences on sleep and physical activity were (1) mental, (2) physical, and (3) environmental factors. The subthemes were explicitly linked with a lack of sleep and poor sleep quality negatively effecting mental health, increasing spasms, pain and fatigue; which increased with less ideal environmental conditions e.g., cold weather, noise. Being physically active was positively related to feelings of motivation, physical and mental wellbeing. Finding activities that were enjoyable and accessible was challenging. Needing more recovery time, having other health conditions and fear after falls, negatively influenced PA participation.

This study highlights the unique challenges faced by adults with CP, at an age where functional ability declines, yet fatigue and daily demands increase. A personalised care approach to 24-hour physical activities, while considering physical, mental and environmental factors and teaching of self-management strategies is recommended.