

Caffeine consumption may negatively impact sleep in some children.

A survey by a University of Nebraska Medical Center child psychologist has found that 75 percent of respondents reported their children consume caffeine on a daily basis and this may negatively impact the sleep of some children.

The data are reported in the Dec. 16 online issue of The Journal of Pediatrics.

William Warzak, Ph.D., a professor of psychology in UNMC's Munroe-Meyer Institute and the department of pediatrics, was the principal investigator on the study.

Parents of more than 200 children between five and 12 years old were surveyed during routine clinical visits at a UNMC pediatric clinic. The parents were asked to report the types and amounts of snacks and beverages their child consumed on a daily basis.

"Some children as young as five years old were consuming the equivalent of a can of soda a day," Dr. Warzak said.

"Many children between the ages of eight and 12 years consumed an average of about three 12-ounce cans of soda per day."

Surprisingly, researchers found that caffeine was not linked to bedwetting in these children, Dr. Warzak said. "Even though caffeine is a diuretic, we didn't find a statistically significant link between caffeine consumption and bedwetting," he said.

“Given the preliminary nature of these data, until they are replicated, I will maintain my recommendation that children who wet the bed should curtail, if not abstain from caffeinated beverages, especially as bedtime approaches.”

Dr. Warzak said the key message of the study is that parents should be aware of their child’s caffeine consumption.

“Parents need to be more careful in monitoring what their children eat and drink,” he said. “Children don’t need to be drinking caffeine. If a child is having sleep difficulties, it becomes even more important for parents to be aware of caffeine intake.”

Dr. Warzak said primary care physicians can play a key role by screening children for caffeine consumption and educating parents about the potentially harmful effects of caffeine.

Assisting Dr. Warzak on the study were: Shelby Evans, Ph.D., who was co-investigator and statistician, now practicing in Wichita, Kan., Margaret Floress, Ph.D., now at Eastern Illinois University; Amy Gross, Ph.D., who is doing her post doctoral work at Johns Hopkins University; and Sharon Stoolman, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics for UNMC and Children’s Hospital and Medical Center.