

# Hope for 500,000 insomniacs in Norway

25 August 2020, by Steinar Brandslet



Digital sleep therapy can help people identify the underlying causes of their sleep problems. Credit: Shutterstock, NTB scanpix

Approximately 500,000 Norwegians suffer from chronic sleep disorders, also called insomnia. Researchers have long known that cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia is the best documented treatment, but few people have access to such therapy.

A fully automated digital version of this treatment has proven effective for many patients and can reduce the use of sleeping pills.

"Our results show that it's possible to provide very effective and drug-free sleep treatment on a large scale. This can be done without meeting with [health](#) personnel," says clinical psychologist Håvard Kallestad.

Kallestad is a researcher at St. Olav's Hospital and in NTNU's Department of Mental Health. He is also one of the first authors of a newly published article in *The Lancet Digital Health*.

## Underlying causes addressed

Digital sleep support can help people identify the underlying causes of their sleep issues. The treatment addresses problematic sleep patterns, various stressors and other factors that interfere

with sleep. Patients keep a journal that can provide insight into their own situation.

The new study in *The Lancet Digital Health* is encouraging.

## Clear improvement following digital sleep therapy

The treatment study included 1721 participants, who received either digital sleep [therapy](#) or good sleep advice and [digital information](#) about sleep problems. All were Norwegian adults over the age of 18 who had difficulty sleeping. The findings are quite clear.

Approximately six of 10 participants (58 percent) experienced substantial improvement from the digital sleep therapy. In the [control group](#), which received good sleep advice and digital information, only around 20 percent experienced a similar effect. The digital sleep treatment was thus about three times as effective.

## Many people slept normally

Thirty-eight percent of participants achieved normal sleep quality after undergoing the digital sleep therapy. Only eight percent of the control group had similar results.

"We also found that the participants who received digital sleep treatment were able to reduce their use of sleeping pills more than participants who only received sleep advice," says Kallestad.

This form of psychological therapy for a significant public health problem could prove to be more accessible than sleep medication treatment.

Digital sleep therapy is fully automated, meaning that no appointment with a health care provider is needed for the treatment. The study interventions were also automated.

The sleep treatment takes about six to eight weeks

to complete.

**More information:** Øystein Vedaa et al. Effects of digital cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia on insomnia severity: a large-scale randomized controlled trial, *The Lancet Digital Health* (2020).

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