

More Australian kids survive leukaemia

WORDS SARAH WIEDERSEHN

More children than ever are surviving leukaemia in Australia and New Zealand but the outlook is much bleaker for children in poorer countries.

A study of 90,000 children diagnosed during 2005-2009 in 53 countries published in *The Lancet Haematology* has found the five-year survival is nearly twice as high for children in some countries compared to others.

The chances of a child still being alive five years after being diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) in Germany was 92 per cent, compared to 52 per cent in Colombia.

In Australia, between 1995-1999 and 2005-2009, five-year survival for childhood ALL – the most common childhood cancer – increased from 82.8 per cent to 88.8 per cent, according to the research. Survival increased from 82.8 per cent to 89.3 per cent in New Zealand. For acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), the five-year survival increased from 53.4 per cent to 68.5 per cent in Australia, and from 67.6 per cent to 74.9 per cent in New Zealand.

Survival has improved for most age groups but remains lowest for babies under one.

Overall, children aged one to nine at diagnosis had higher survival for both types of leukaemia than those aged 10-14.

Leukaemia Foundation chief executive Bill Petch says it is great news that Australian ALL patients are on par with the rest of the world, a result of treatments more tailored for children rather than adults. "We are fortunate in Australia to have specialised paediatric cancer treating centres and the Leukaemia Foundation's supportive care framework which all children with a leukaemia diagnosis can access, regardless of where a child lives," Mr Petch says.

According to the latest data on global childhood cancer incidence, published in *The Lancet Oncology*, leukaemia is the most common cancer in children aged 0-14 worldwide, accounting for a third of cancer cases in children aged nine and under, and a quarter of cases in 10-14 year-olds.

The rare disease, which accounts for an estimated 0.3 per cent of all cancers in Australia, leads to an overproduction of immature white blood cells, called lymphoblasts or leukaemic blasts. These cells crowd the bone marrow, preventing it from making normal blood cells.

One in 10 children diagnosed with leukaemia in Australia will not survive, and more needs to be done to improve survival rates, says Mr Petch.

A good night's sleep is just a dream for tech addicts

WORDS NADJA FLEET

An Adelaide sleep expert urges people to turn off technology an hour before bed time in a bid to protect their sleep. The call comes as new research found Australians are spending more time in front of the screen than they are sleeping

Burnside Hospital respiratory and sleep physician Dr Dien Dang says technology can improve awareness of what good sleep should be, however it also plays a less favourable role in decreasing sleep health for both young and old.

"We no longer work an eight hour day," he says.

"Our work and social lives now intrude on our once-protected sleep time. It's all at the expense of our sleep health. We are a 24 hour society either with work or social commitments, and sometimes it can negatively impact on our sleep patterns."

The Lonergan Research, released in March and prepared for Poem Group and OPSM, interviewed 1000 Australians, aged over 18, about their technology habits.

The data shows Australians are exposed to blue light emitted from computer, mobile phone and television screens more than one third of each day, or 9.4 hours.

This is more than the average amount of time spent asleep – 7.3 hours.

The research also shows Australians spend more time glued to electronic devices than they eat, commute, work and exercise combined.

Experts believe exposure to blue light – light with short wavelengths that produce a high amount of energy – increases alertness.

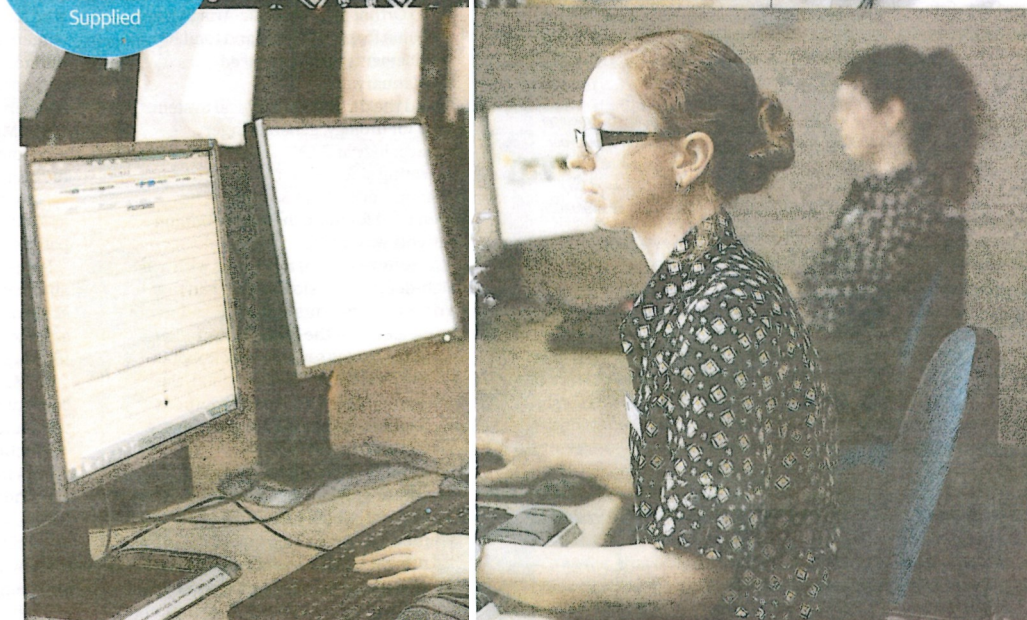
Dr Dang says using technology around bedtimes and sleeping can foster "bad sleep hygiene" as it prolongs the time we take to start our sleep time.

"Our phones, tablets and TV all emit blue light which promotes wakefulness," he says.

"While global technology companies are now combating this issue with night shift mode to reduce blue-wavelengths and light levels, it's recommended to switch off all technology and wind down at least an hour before sleeping to avoid a restless night."

The research also shows 68 per cent of Australians are concerned about blue light exposure and nearly four in five respondents to the survey would like to reduce the amount of blue light they are exposed to.

Staff monitor data at the Burnside Hospital Sleep Centre (left). A patient has sleep sensors fitted (right). PICTURES: Supplied



DID YOU KNOW?

There are more than 60 distinct types of sleep disorders. These sleep disorders can present at different stages of an adolescent and adult life, and are more common in some individuals than others.

Circadian Rhythm Disturbances, Narcolepsy (an overwhelming state of sleepiness despite superficially 'normal' overnight sleep) and Parasomnias (such as sleepwalking or sleep talking) are most commonly found in children and teenagers, although 3 per cent of adults still sleepwalk and sleep talk. Middle aged men are most commonly diagnosed with Obstructive Sleep Apnoea, while middle aged women are most often diagnosed with Obstructive Sleep Apnoea or The Restless Legs Syndrome, Dr Dang said.



TOP TIPS

Dr Dien Dang provides his top tips for achieving a better night's sleep

Have a regular sleep pattern. Try to maintain the same bedtime and wake up time, even at the weekends. Routine is important to your body clock.

Create a bedtime routine that promotes relaxation.

Evaluate your room so that it's ideal for sleeping. Your room should be cool, dark and quiet for optimal sleep.

Control your exposure to light. Limit bright lights in the evening (including all devices) within one to two hours of your bedtime as this can be disruptive to sleep.

Include physical activity in your daily routine. Naturally, exercise can promote better sleep, helping you to fall asleep faster and to enjoy deeper sleep. However, timing is important. Try to finish moderate to vigorous exercise at least three hours before bed. Perhaps consider exercising in the mornings.

Watch what you eat and drink. Caffeine, alcohol and certain meals can disrupt sleep. Manage your food and drink intake prior to going to sleep to ensure you avoid discomfort or restlessness.

Signs that may indicate you need to see a sleep physician (for which you will need a referral from your GP):

If you are constantly feeling tired throughout the day and not waking up feeling refreshed

If you are experiencing sleepwalking or sleep talking which may sometimes result in injuries to yourself or your bed partner

If you are concerned about your snoring, a sleep study can ensure that you don't have Sleep Apnoea which may require further attention

If you have any pre-existing health issues including uncontrolled high blood pressure, Atrial Fibrillation, glaucoma, or have had / are at risk of heart attacks or stroke, a sleep study is highly recommended.

BURNSIDE HOSPITAL SLEEP CENTRE

The six-bed purpose-built sleep centre at Burnside Hospital provides patients with comprehensive diagnostic and treatment services for the full spectrum of sleep disorders.

The centre caters to a broad range of underlying sleep health issues, and Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) is one of the most common seen.

"At Burnside Hospital, we provide a comprehensive whole-life approach to all sleep disorders, from 14 year old patients and beyond. We cater to all types of sleep disorders at any phase of the adolescent and adult life," respiratory and sleep physician Dr Dien Dang says.