



Title	Sleep duration and risk of breast cancer : The JACC Study
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1 **Sleep Duration and Risk of Breast Cancer: The JACC Study**

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23 **Abstract**

24 **Purpose**—The evidence on beneficial or adverse effects of sleep duration  
25 on risk of breast cancer remains controversial and limited, especially in  
26 Asia.

27 **Methods**—A prospective study of 34 350 women aged 40-79 years in  
28 whom sleep duration, menstrual and reproductive histories were  
29 determined by a self-administered questionnaire. The follow-up period  
30 was from 1988 to 2009, and hazard ratios (HRs) with 95% confidence  
31 intervals (CIs) of breast cancer incidence were calculated for shorter sleep  
32 duration in reference to sleep duration of  $\geq 8$  h/d by Cox proportional  
33 hazard models.

34 **Results**—During 19.2-year median follow-up (236 cases), we found a  
35 significant inverse association between sleep duration and risk of breast  
36 cancer, especially among postmenopausal women and women with low  
37 parity (nulliparous and women with  $< 3$  children); the multivariable HRs  
38 (95% CIs) among postmenopausal women who reported 7h/d and  $\leq 6$ h/d  
39 of sleep in reference to  $\geq 8$  h/d were 1.49 (0.81-2.76) and 1.98 (1.08-3.70)  
40 (P for trend = 0.028), and those values among women with low parity  
41 were 1.50 (0.96-2.35) and 1.76 (1.01-2.79) (P for trend = 0.018).

42 **Conclusions**—Short sleep duration was associated with increased risk of  
43 incident breast cancer, especially among postmenopausal women and  
44 women with low parity.

45 **Keywords:** sleep duration; breast cancer; incidence; cohort study;

46 postmenopausal; parity; Japan

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67 **Introduction**

68 Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Japanese women  
69 followed by colon and rectum cancer [1]. The associations between sleep  
70 duration and risk of breast cancer among women has a complex nature  
71 and remains controversial [2]. Previous case-control and cohort studies  
72 have reported no association between sleep duration and risk of breast  
73 cancer [2-7]. However, several other studies showed lower risk of breast  
74 cancer with longer sleep duration ( $\geq 9$ h/d) [8-10], while some other  
75 studies indicated that longer sleep duration ( $\geq 9$ h/d) was associated with  
76 increased risk of breast cancer [11-12].

77 Melatonin is suggested as an agent in the association between sleep  
78 duration and breast cancer [13-14]. Melatonin (5-methoxytryptamine) is  
79 synthesized and secreted by the pineal gland in the brain and controls the  
80 body's circadian rhythm [13]. Darkness during sleep stimulates the  
81 release of melatonin [7,9,15], and melatonin may inhibit breast  
82 tumorigenesis directly by inhibiting mammary cell proliferation and  
83 invasiveness, and indirectly by decreasing estrogen levels via a  
84 down-regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary reproductive axis and  
85 regulating the activity of the aromatases, the enzymes responsible for the  
86 local estrogens synthesis [16-19].

87 Some studies showed menopausal status to be associated with risk of  
88 breast cancer because of ageing [20], higher levels of adiposity [21-22] or

89 endogenous estrogen [23]. Furthermore, short sleep duration, especially  
90 among postmenopausal women, was associated with high risk of breast  
91 cancer in several cohort studies [8-10, 24]. Abundant previous findings  
92 have also shown parity as an indicator for breast cancer risk [25-27].  
93 Meanwhile, multiparous women have reported longer sleep duration than  
94 nulliparous women [28].

95 Thus, we thought to examine the associations between sleep duration  
96 and risk of breast cancer among premenopausal and postmenopausal  
97 women, and among low and high parous women in a large  
98 population-based Japanese study, the Japan Collaborative Cohort study  
99 (JACC).

100

## 101 **Materials and methods**

### 102 **Study population and ascertainment of breast cancer**

103 Details of the study design and subjects have been described elsewhere  
104 [29]. Briefly, the baseline data of the JACC Study were collected from  
105 1988 to 1990, and 110 585 individuals (46 395 men and 64 190 women)  
106 aged 40 to 79 years in 45 study areas throughout Japan participated in the  
107 study. The follow-up survey for cancer incidence was conducted from the  
108 baseline, and finalized at the end of the 2009. In 24 areas out of the 45  
109 study areas, data on cancer incidence such as date of diagnosis and  
110 primary site were collected simultaneously through population-based

111 cancer registries or by reviewing the records of local and major hospitals.  
112 After excluding male subjects, we confined the analysis to women from  
113 these 24 areas where cancer incidence information are available (n=36  
114 266). Excluding data of women with previous diagnosis of breast cancer  
115 (n=11), and women with missing data on sleep duration (n =1 905) left a  
116 total of 34 350 (19 529 premenopausal, and 14 821 postmenopausal)  
117 women for the analysis. This study was sponsored by the Ministry of  
118 Education, Sports and Science. Informed consent was obtained from  
119 participants asking their will to participate to the JACC study in the  
120 baseline questionnaire. The ethics committees of Nagoya University  
121 School of Medicine and Osaka University approved the protocol of this  
122 study.

### 123 **Exposure and other covariates assessment**

124 Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire including sleep  
125 duration, information on age, family history of diseases, history of  
126 hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, height,  
127 weight, education background, smoking status, alcohol drinking habit,  
128 physical activity, mental stress, dietary habits, reproductive and menstrual  
129 history, menopause and hormone use. Body mass index was calculated by  
130 dividing reported weight in kilograms by the square of reported height in  
131 meters.

### 132 **Assessment of sleep duration**

133 We obtained information about the average sleep duration on weekdays  
134 during the preceding year. The average sleep duration per day was  
135 classified into 3 categories:  $\leq 6$ , 7 and  $\geq 8$  hours. Fractions hours were  
136 rounded off (e g, 7 hours represented responses from 7.0 to 7.9 hours).

### 137 **Statistical analysis**

138 Mean values (standard deviations) and proportions of baseline risk  
139 characteristics were calculated, and the linear trends in those variables  
140 according to sleep duration were tested by the linear regression analysis  
141 for continuous variables and the logistic regression analysis for  
142 proportional variables. Person-years of follow-up were calculated from  
143 the responding date to the baseline questionnaire until the obtainment of  
144 one out of four possible endpoints as follows: 1) incidence of breast  
145 cancer event, 2) relocation from the study area, 3) the end of the study on  
146 31 December 2009, or 4) death. Because some study areas discontinued  
147 the follow-up survey regarding cancer before 2009 (1994 in one study  
148 area, 1997 in two areas, 1999 in one area, 2000 in one area, 2002 in one  
149 area, 2003 in one area, 2006 in two areas, and 2008 in two areas).

150 Cox proportional hazard regression age- and multivariable-adjusted  
151 models were used to estimate the hazard ratios (HRs) with 95%  
152 confidence intervals (CIs) for breast cancer incidence according to sleep  
153 duration ( $\leq 6$ h, 7h and  $\geq 8$  h/d) as the reference to  $\geq 8$  h/d, and in relation  
154 to 1-SD decrement (1.07 h/d) of sleep duration. The confounding factors



155 included age (continuous), age of menarche (< 14, 14-15 and >15 y), age  
156 of menopause (< 45, 45-50 and >50 y), age at first child birth (< 25 and ≥  
157 25 y), type of menopause (nature or operation), body mass index  
158 (continuous), sport time per week (never, <1, 1-2, 3-4 and ≥5 h/wk),  
159 walking time per day (never, < 30, 30-60 and ≥60 minutes/d), currently  
160 married (yes or no), smoking status (never, ex-smoker and current  
161 smoker), alcohol intake (never, ex-drinker and current drinker of 0.1-22.9,  
162 23.0-45.9, and ≥ 46.0 g ethanol/d), parity (0, 1, 2 and ≥3), use of sex  
163 hormone (yes or no), family history of breast cancer (yes or no), and  
164 history of diabetes (yes or no). The stratification analyses were performed  
165 by potential effect modifiers such as menopausal status and number of  
166 children. Values for *P*-interaction were calculated for cross-product terms  
167 of menopausal status (dichotomous) or number of children (continuous)  
168 with sleep duration categories (1 to 3 corresponding to ≤ 6, 7 and ≥ 8 h/d  
169 of sleep duration) for the categorical analysis and sleep duration (h/d) for  
170 the continuous analysis. We used SAS Version 9.4 software (SAS  
171 Institute Inc, Cary, NC) for statistical analysis. All statistical tests were  
172 2-tailed and values of *P* <0.05 were regarded as significant.

173

## 174 **Results**

175 Table 1 shows the baseline characteristics of women according to sleep  
176 duration. Women who reported ≤ 6 h/d of sleep were more likely to have

177 a family history of breast cancer and to have used sex hormones. On the  
178 other hand, women who reported  $\geq 8$  h/d of sleep were of older age at  
179 menarche, with higher BMI and were more likely to have natural  
180 menopause and  $\geq 3$  children.

181 With reference to women with sleep duration  $\geq 8$  h/d, there was  
182 higher risk of breast cancer among women with shorter sleep duration in  
183 total women (Table 2). The multivariable HRs (95% CIs) of breast cancer  
184 were 1.36 (0.98-1.90) for 7 h and 1.31 (0.92-1.86) for  $\leq 6$  h sleep per day.

185 Table 3 shows the stratification analyses by menopausal status and  
186 parity (number of children). The inverse associations between sleep  
187 duration and risk of breast cancer were confined to postmenopausal  
188 women, the multivariable HRs (95% CIs) of breast cancer were 1.49  
189 (0.81-2.76) for 7 h and 1.98 (1.08-3.70) for  $\leq 6$  h sleep per day (P for  
190 trend = 0.028); however, the interaction by menopausal status was not  
191 statistically significant ( $P_{\text{interaction}} = 0.264$ ). The inverse association was  
192 also evident among low parous women including nulliparous and women  
193 with  $< 3$  children. The multivariable HRs (95% CIs) for breast cancer risk  
194 among low parous women who have reported 7 h and  $\leq 6$  h sleep per day  
195 compared with those reported  $\geq 8$ h/d were 1.50 (0.96-2.35) and 1.76  
196 (1.01-2.79), respectively (P for trend = 0.018,  $P_{\text{interaction}} = 0.002$ ).

197

## 198 Discussion

199 During 19.2-years median follow-up for 34 350 women aged  $\geq 40$  years,  
200 we observed that short sleep duration was associated with increased risk  
201 of incident breast cancer among Japanese women. This positive  
202 association was more evident for postmenopausal women and women  
203 with number of children  $< 3$ , although the interaction with parity but not  
204 menopausal status was statistically significant.

205 The high risk of incident breast cancer with short sleep duration found  
206 in our study is consistent with findings from previous prospective cohort  
207 studies [8, 24]. Among 42 840 women of the Southern Community  
208 Cohort Study, shorter sleep was associated with increased risk of breast  
209 cancer; odds ratios (95% CIs) were 2.13 (1.15- 3.93) for  $<6$  h/day, 1.66  
210 (0.92- 3.02) for 6 h/d and 2.22 (1.19-4.12) for 7 h/d compared with  $\geq 8$   
211 h/d ( P for trend = 0.04) [24]. Similar results were found among 7 396  
212 Finnish women [8]. However, those studies did not examine the  
213 association by menopausal status or parity. In Japan, Kakizaki et al  
214 examined the association between sleep duration and risk of incident  
215 breast cancer among 23 995 women in the Ohsaki National Health  
216 Insurance (NHI) Cohort Study, and showed that women who reported  $\geq 9$   
217 h/d sleep in reference to those with  $\leq 6$ h/d had lower breast cancer risk:  
218 the multivariable HR (95%CI) was 0.29 (0.09–0.98, P for trend = 0.002).  
219 The reduced risk was observed among postmenopausal women; 0.74  
220 (0.35–1.59, P for trend = 0.09) but not among premenopausal; 1.48

221 (0.56–3.93, P for trend = 0.27) (P for interaction = 0.70) [10]. Among 33  
222 528 women participated in the Singapore Chinese Health Study, Wu et al  
223 reported inverse trends in breast cancer risk across sleep duration  
224 categories among postmenopausal women, but not among total or  
225 premenopausal women. In reference to sleep duration for  $\leq 6$  h/d, the  
226 multivariable HRs (95% CIs) among postmenopausal women in the  
227 categories 7, 8 and  $\geq 9$  h/d were 0.94 (0.70-1.20), 0.81 (0.60-1.10) and  
228 0.67 (0.40-1.10) (P for trend = 0.047) [9]. Previous studies have shown  
229 high risk of breast cancer in nulliparous or women with low parity than  
230 that in multiparous women [25]. Again, the inverse association between  
231 sleep duration and risk of breast cancer was observed among women with  
232  $< 3$  children including nulliparous women more than that among those  
233 with  $\geq 3$  children.

234 Shorter sleep duration was associated with lower levels of urinary  
235 melatonin; 42% lower in Chinese women reported  $\leq 6$  h of sleep duration  
236 than levels in women reported  $\geq 9$  h of sleep duration in the Singapore  
237 Chinese Health Study [9]. Because sleep stimulates the release of  
238 melatonin [9], melatonin is suggested a biological mediator for the  
239 sleep/breast cancer association. Higher levels of melatonin may associate  
240 with reduced risk of breast cancer by the following mechanisms; (a)  
241 melatonin interacts with estrogen receptors (ER) on the epithelial  
242 mammary cells, leading to direct inhibition of mammary cell proliferation

243 and invasiveness [23]; (b) melatonin interacts with the neuroendocrine  
244 reproductive axis and the hypothalamic-pituitary reproductive axis,  
245 leading to a down-regulation of some hormones which promote tumor  
246 growth, especially gonadal estrogens and prolactin [30]; (c) melatonin  
247 inhibits telomerase enzymes activity, responsible for estrogen synthesis in  
248 tumor cells and adjacent peritumor fat tissues [31]; (d) melatonin has  
249 antioxidant properties of melatonin can suppress oncogenesis [32].

250 Postmenopausal women are at higher risk of breast cancer than  
251 premenopausal women because of higher levels of adiposity among  
252 postmenopausal women [21-22] which serve as the primary source of  
253 endogenous estrogen transformed from androgen by enhanced aromatase  
254 expression and activity [22]. On the other hand, nulliparous and women  
255 with low parity showed lower urinary excretion of melatonin [15] and  
256 higher levels of estrogens and prolactin, but lower levels of sex  
257 hormone-binding globulins [33-35]. These factors were associated with  
258 increased risk of estrogen-receptor-positive carcinogenic tumors. Thus,  
259 the sleep-induced melatonin secretion could, at least partially, explain the  
260 inverse association of sleep duration with risk of breast cancer in high  
261 risk group of postmenopausal women and women with low parity in our  
262 study.

263 The strengths of our study were its prospective design, which avoided  
264 recall bias and the availability of information on potential confounding

265 factors. Our subjects were recruited from the general population, the  
266 sample was large and the response rate to the questionnaire was high  
267 [29,36]. In addition, the cancer registry of the study had sufficient quality  
268 to reduce the possibility of misclassification of outcomes [37].

269 There are several limitations in this study. First, we did not obtain  
270 information about the quality of sleep, such as the presence or absence of  
271 sleep apnea or other sleep disorders, which were associated with  
272 increased risk of breast cancer via intermittent hypoxia and suppression  
273 of the immune system [38]. Second, we used self-reported information on  
274 sleep duration obtained only at baseline, we cannot rule out the possibility  
275 of change in sleep duration during the long follow-up, and the self-report  
276 may lead to some misclassification. However, self-reported sleep duration  
277 was shown to yield valid results in comparison with quantitative sleep  
278 assessment with actigraphy;  $r = 0.57$  for nighttime sleep duration [39].  
279 Third, we could not examine a potential adverse effect of long sleep  
280 duration, because of the low proportion of participants and the few  
281 number of cases in the long sleep duration of  $\geq 9$ h/d category (5.6% of  
282 participants and 6 breast cancer cases). Fourth, nulliparous women are at  
283 high risk for breast cancer [25]. However, only 6.7% of our studied  
284 women were nulliparous and there was no breast cancer case in the sleep  
285 duration category of  $\geq 8$ h/d. Therefore, we could not treat them as a  
286 separate category in the stratification analysis; but, we added them to

287 women with low parity < 3 children. Finally, we did not collect the data  
288 on blood melatonin levels or urinary excretions; therefore, the exact  
289 contribution of melatonin in the observed associations between sleep  
290 duration and risk of incident breast cancer cannot be certified.

291 In summary, short sleep duration was associated with increased risk  
292 of incident breast cancer, especially among postmenopausal women and  
293 women with low parity. Health education to women about the need for  
294 proper sleep duration is suggested and further research is needed to  
295 confirm the observed associations.

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312 **Compliance with Ethical Standards:**

313 Conflict of Interest: All authors declare that they have no conflict of  
314 interest.

315 Ethical approval: All procedures performed in this study were in  
316 accordance with the Helsinki declaration and was approved by Osaka and  
317 Nagoya Universities research ethics committees.

318 Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants  
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**Table 1. Distributions of potential risk factors according to sleep duration in a cohort of 34,350 Japanese women.**

Parameters	Sleep duration			P for trend
	≤ 6 h	7 h	≥ 8 h	
No. at risk	10064	12979	11307	
Age, y (SD)	60.7 (7.7)	60.2 (7.2)	62.6 (7.6)	<0.001
Age at menarche, y (SD)	15.0 (1.8)	15.0 (1.7)	15.3 (1.8)	<0.001
Age at menopause, y (SD)	48.6 (4.6)	48.6 (4.7)	48.7 (4.5)	0.318
Natural menopause, %	86.6	87.2	88.1	0.005
Age at first child birth, y (SD)	24.7 (3.3)	24.5 (3.1)	24.2 (3.0)	<0.001
Parity (number of children)				
0	3.0	3.4	3.2	<0.001
1	8.0	7.9	6.7	
2	34.5	35.8	28.7	
≥ 3	54.5	52.9	61.3	
Family history of breast cancer, %	1.5	1.4	1.2	0.023
Body mass index, kg/m <sup>2</sup> (SD)	22.9 (3.2)	22.9 (3.1)	23.1 (3.3)	<0.001
Currently married, %	78.1	81.9	77.6	0.065
Sports ≥3h/wk, %	10.9	10.9	11.5	0.500
Walking time ≥60min/d, %	73.1	74.1	74.6	0.013
Current smoking, %	2.6	2.1	2.7	0.250
Alcohol intake, g ethanol/d (SD)	8.6 (10.6)	8.4 (10.6)	9.1 (12.7)	0.838
Sex hormone use, %	5.1	4.6	3.7	<0.001
History of diabetes, %	5.7	4.1	6.1	0.403

**Table 2. Age-adjusted and multivariable hazard ratios (95% confidence intervals) of incident breast cancer according to sleep duration for total women.**

	Sleep duration			P for trend	<sup>1</sup> 1SD decrement (1.07 h/d) of sleep duration
	≤ 6 h	7 h	≥ 8 h		
<b>Total women</b>					
Person-year	165359	221198	194205		
Breast cancer, n.	74	101	61		
Age-adjusted HR (95%CI)	1.31 (0.93–1.85)	1.35 (1.98–1.86)	1.00	0.133	1.11 (0.97–1.27)
Multivariable HR (95%CI) <sup>2</sup>	1.31 (0.92–1.86)	1.36 (0.98–1.90)	1.00	0.149	1.13 (0.98–1.29)

\* <sup>1</sup> 1SD decrement in sleep duration = 1.07 h/d.

\* <sup>2</sup> Adjusted for age, age at menarche, age at first child birth, body mass index, parity (number of children), family history of breast cancer, marital status, sport time, walking time, alcohol intake, smoking status, hormone use, history of diabetes, and age and type of menopause.

**Table 3. Multivariable hazard ratios (95% confidence intervals) of incident breast cancer according to sleep duration, stratified by menopausal status and number of children.**

	Sleep duration			P for trend	<sup>1</sup> SD decrement (1.07 h/d) of sleep duration
	≤ 6 h	7 h	≥ 8 h		
<b>Menopausal status</b>					
<b>Premenopause</b>					
Person-year	102201	138570	114858		
Breast cancer, n.	46	74	43		
Age-adjusted HR (95%CI)	1.10 (0.72–1.69)	1.32 (0.90–1.94)	1.00	0.689	1.05 (0.89–1.24)
Multivariable HR (95%CI) <sup>2</sup>	1.11 (0.72–1.71)	1.34 (0.90–1.98)	1.00	0.687	1.07 (0.90–1.27)
<b>Postmenopause</b>					
Person-year	63158	82628	79347		
Breast cancer, n.	28	27	18		
Age-adjusted HR (95%CI)	1.92 (1.06–3.49)	1.43 (0.78–2.60)	1.00	0.031	1.26 (1.00–1.58)
Multivariable HR (95%CI) <sup>3</sup>	1.98 (1.08–3.70)	1.49 (0.81–2.76)	1.00	0.028	1.28 (1.01–1.61)
<i>P</i> <sub>interaction</sub>				0.264	0.400
<b>Number of children</b>					
<b>0 to 2</b>					
Person-year	89345	122823	94275		
Breast cancer, n.	52	60	32		
Age-adjusted HR (95%CI)	1.66 (1.06–2.59)	1.40 (0.91–2.16)	1.00	0.027	1.21 (1.01–1.44)
Multivariable HR (95%CI) <sup>4</sup>	1.76 (1.01–2.79)	1.50 (0.96–2.35)	1.00	0.018	1.26 (1.05–1.51)
<b>≥ 3</b>					
Person-year	76014	98375	99929		

Breast cancer, n.	22	41	29		
Age-adjusted HR (95%CI)	0.88 (0.50–1.55)	1.27 (0.78–2.08)	1.00	0.692	0.98 (0.80–1.21)
Multivariable HR (95%CI) <sup>4</sup>	0.83 (0.46–1.48)	1.24 (0.75–2.04)	1.00	0.562	0.96 (0.77–1.20)
<b><i>P</i><sub>interaction</sub></b>				0.002	0.014

\* <sup>1</sup> 1SD decrement in sleep duration = 1.07 h/d.

\* <sup>2</sup> Adjusted for age, age at menarche, age at first child birth, body mass index, parity (number of children), family history of breast cancer, marital status, sport time, walking time, alcohol intake, smoking status, hormone use, history of diabetes.

\* <sup>3</sup> Adjusted further for age and type of menopause.

\* <sup>4</sup> Adjusted for age, age at menarche, age at first child birth, body mass index, family history of breast cancer, marital status, sport time, walking time, alcohol intake, smoking status, hormone use, history of diabetes, and age and type of menopause.