# Sleep deprivation risks empathy and judgment in political leaders, warns Russell Foster



A recent discussion at the Hay Festival brought attention to an unsettling reality: the profound impact of sleep on empathy and decision-making—facts that become even more critical when applied to our political leaders. Renowned neuroscientist Russell Foster, a professor of circadian neuroscience at the University of Oxford, shared alarming insights on how sleep deprivation can skew perceptions and fuel impulsive behaviours at the highest levels of power.

Foster pointed out that a lack of sleep diminishes empathy and intensifies a focus on negative experiences, a revelation that resonates strongly in today's political climate. “One of the first things that goes when you’re tired is empathy,” he stated, revealing how our leaders, consumed by late-night strategizing and relentless campaigning, often store negative memories while dismissing the positive. This skewed outlook poses a grave risk to leadership; when decision-makers become unable to appreciate the nuances of public sentiment, the consequences for society become dire.

The implications of this for our political landscape are particularly alarming. While everyday people grapple with choices—like navigating traffic lights—politicians are faced with weighty decisions that can alter the course of history. “I suspect they’re not getting the sleep that they need to make sensible, coherent decisions,” Foster warned, underscoring that in recent times, with a new Labour government in place and ongoing political turmoil, rushed and ill-considered decisions could spiral into broader societal issues.

The urgency of Foster's observations is accentuated by forthcoming research on sleep patterns among politicians, suggesting a troubling reality: many of those in power disregard the importance of restorative sleep amidst their packed schedules. The recent reshaping of our political landscape demands leaders who are sharp, insightful, and capable of taking the country in the right direction—a stark contrast to the current trajectory under the new administration, which has already shown signs of hasty, poorly thought-out policies.

Foster’s discussion highlights the importance of sleep not only within politics but across the spectrum of societal well-being. As he elaborated, our circadian rhythms govern critical biological processes necessary for effective health management—a facet seemingly overlooked by many leaders, now preoccupied with political expedience rather than long-term governance.

As stress and the demands of today’s fast-paced life continue to rob many of quality sleep, the need for this crucial conversation grows ever more pressing. To foster empathy and informed decision-making, adequate sleep must be prioritised—not only a personal necessity but an essential component in the leadership of our nation’s future.

The Hay Festival, a notable hub for diverse discussions, served as a fitting backdrop for this critical dialogue. As attendees mulled over Foster’s insights, it became clear that the path to a more responsible and empathetic government may begin with acknowledging the profound importance of a good night’s sleep—a need paramount in an era rife with hasty leadership decisions that threaten the very fabric of our society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/sleep-empathy-impulsivity-b2760013.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/sleep-empathy-impulsivity-b2760013.html> - An article from The Independent discusses how sleep deprivation can reduce empathy and increase negative thinking. Russell Foster, a professor of circadian neuroscience at the University of Oxford, explains that tiredness leads to a loss of empathy and a tendency to focus on negative experiences. He also notes that sleep deprivation can result in impulsive, unreflective decisions. Foster highlights the importance of adequate sleep for leaders to make sensible, coherent decisions. He mentions a forthcoming pilot study on the sleeping patterns of politicians.
3. <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-20225-russell-foster.aspx> - A Hay Festival event featuring Russell Foster, director of the Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute at the University of Oxford, discussing his book 'Life Time: The New Science of the Body Clock and How It Can Revolutionise Your Sleep and Health'. Foster explores how our bodies are governed by a 24-hour biological clock and the effects of the time of day on our health. The event took place on 4 June 2023.
4. <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-20225-russell-foster.aspx> - An event at the Hay Festival featuring Russell Foster, director of the Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute at the University of Oxford, discussing his book 'Life Time: The New Science of the Body Clock and How It Can Revolutionise Your Sleep and Health'. Foster delves into how our bodies are governed by a 24-hour biological clock and the impact of the time of day on our health. The event was held on 4 June 2023.
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