

Too Much or Too Little Sleep Can Lead to Weight Gain and Disease

You may know that your genetic makeup, what you eat, how often you exercise -- and even stress -- affect your weight and health. But, did you know that how much sleep you get -- too much or too little -- also can affect body weight and health? If you're trying to slim down or even maintain your weight, getting your zzzz's is just as important as hitting the gym.

National Sleep Foundation Recommendations

The National Sleep Foundation recommends adults and kids get the following amount of sleep:

- Newborns -- 14 to 17 hours
- Infants -- 12 to 15 hours
- Toddlers -- 11 to 14 hours
- Preschoolers -- 10 to 13 hours
- School age -- 9 to 11 hours
- Teens -- 8 to 10 hours
- Young adults -- 7 to 9 hours
- Adults -- 7 to 9 hours
- Older Adults 65+ -- 7 to 8 hours

However, most Americans aren't getting enough sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation. On average, U.S. adults reported sleeping seven hours and 36 minutes (on average) on weekdays. A Gallup Poll concurred, revealing that 40 percent of Americans get less than seven hours of sleep each night.

Chronic partial sleep loss may increase the risk of obesity and weight gain, and weaken the immune system, according to research reported by the European Society of Endocrinology, the Mayo Clinic, and the National Center for Biotechnology Information. Sleep has an important influence on neuroendocrine function and glucose metabolism in children as well as in adults. The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) reports that adequate sleep duration and quality are important for the normal functioning of daily metabolic and hormonal processes and appetite regulation. Chronic sleep deprivation has harmful effects on carbohydrate metabolism and is associated with an increased risk of diabetes. Sleep restriction can decrease glucose and insulin sensitivity, two critical factors involved in the development or prevention of diabetes.

Lack of Sleep Increases Energy and Fat Intake

Another major problem associated with a lack of sleep is an increased daytime cortisol level, according to NCBI. High levels of cortisol destroy healthy muscle and bone, and slow down the healing and regeneration process. Altered levels of hormones central to appetite regulation, such as leptin and ghrelin, also occur in sleep-deprived individuals, increasing the likelihood of overeating, reports the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Data show that a lack of sleep increases energy and fat intakes. If

sustained and not compensated by increased activity, the dietary intakes of individuals undergoing short sleep could lead to obesity.

Sleep Strategies

How, then, do you ensure you get the proper amount of sleep to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle? Here are some tips:

Determine the recommended amount of sleep you need, and then establish a bedtime and wake time. Stick with it -- even on the weekends. You will have the most restorative sleep if sleep is predictable.

Create a calming bedtime routine. About an hour before bed, start your routine. The routine could include readying things you'll need the next day -- like what clothing you'll wear. Before bedtime, initiate quiet time and avoid using electronic devices as they can make it difficult to sleep. The routine should include relaxing activities, like listening to calming music, reading or a bath.

- Avoid large meals too close to bedtime, but don't go to bed hungry. A small snack is okay.
- Keep bedrooms cool and comfortable. The best temperature for sleep is between 68 and 72 degrees.
- Do a bedding check, and replace old pillows, and clean duvet covers, pillow covers and mattress pads.

Sleep and Weight

The right amount of quality sleep is critical to your health. Establish good sleeping habits and not only will you have more energy, be more alert and more productive, you will be healthier and may even shed a few unwanted pounds.

1. How many hours of sleep are you supposed to get each night? How many hours are you on average typically getting?
2. How does lack of sleep increase your fat intake?
3. What are some things you can do to improve your sleeping?