

The Sleep and Weight Loss Connection



Subscribing to the notion of “I’ll sleep when I’m dead.”, carries more negative effects than realized. When sleep deprivation occurs occasionally, one can usually recover without substantial side effects. However, recurring sleep deprivation, called sleep deficiency, does carry some serious negative side effects. Sleep deficiency correlates with weight gain and chronic health problems including an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, depression, Alzheimer's and death. Deep, restorative sleep is vital for cell repair within the body and for weight loss and maintenance. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends adults get 7-8 hours of sleep per day.

Lack of sleep affects the hormones that regulate appetite and stimulates cravings for carbohydrate-rich foods, leading to unhealthy eating. Hormones affected include leptin (which decreases hunger), ghrelin (which increases hunger), and endocannabinoids (which regulates appetite). Studies show that participants with imbalanced hormones ate 300 calories more of snacks compared to well-rested participants. When cortisol (a stress hormone that provides energy) remains elevated, it can disrupt sleep and cause weight gain. Research showed sleep deprived participants gained nearly two pounds in 5 days from less physical activity and from excess calorie consumption while staying awake longer at night.

Stress Relief Mismanaged

Winding down to relax an exhausted mind and body is common practice before bedtime. However, if stress relief is regularly taking the form of staring into the television or having a night-cap after a long day, take a look at your sleep hygiene. Both of these are actually stimulating and disrupt sleep. What the body actually needs is sleep. Next time you're ready to start relaxing, try preparing your bedroom for some shut eye and get an early restful sleep.

Sleep Tips for Weight Loss

Duration:

- Daily Sleep—A sleep cycle lasts about 90 minutes. Plan to sleep 4-6 cycles; the most deep sleep happens during cycles 2-3.
- Napping—While napping is not a requirement, one should plan on 1-full, 90 minute sleep cycle. If time does not allow for a 90 minute nap, plan a 15-20 minute nap to avoid feeling groggy when waking. A 90-minute sleep cycle has 5 stages, stage 4 is the most deep sleep. Sleeping greater than 20-minutes but less than 90-minutes is liable to leave you feeling groggy versus refreshed if you wake during stage 4.

Hygiene:

- Lights out at the same time each night
- Rise within 30 minutes of the same time each day
- Experiment with 8 hours of sleep each night, +/- 15 minutes
- Prioritize relaxing, stress-free evening activities that help wind you down to rest

Resetting The Body's Inner Clock

While everyone has their own unique physiology, the best way to determine how much sleep your body needs is to turn off your alarms while on vacation. Go to sleep at your usual time and wake when your body tells you to. The first couple of nights your body may sleep longer than usual if you are sleep deprived; after that your body should wake when it is rested. Use the natural waking time as your guide for minimum amount of sleep your body needs.

- Avoid stimulating evening activities until you get into a sleep rhythm
- Avoid electronics and blue spectrum light exposure one hour before bed
- Reduce or ideally, eliminate alcohol and caffeine
- Aim to finish dinner two to three hours before you get into bed