

Catch Your ZZZZs

If you're feeling tired from lack of sleep, you are not alone. A Gallup poll found that four out of 10 Americans get less than seven hours of sleep a night. But did you know that not getting enough sleep affects more than your energy level? Not getting sufficient sleep also affects your weight.

One might think that if one is spending more hours awake, one would burn more calories than if sleeping. But studies have shown that short habitual sleep time is associated with an increased body mass index (BMI). Your body has a hormonal system that regulates your appetite. If you typically get five hours of sleep a night or less, you have an increase in the “feed me” hormone and a decrease in the “I’m not hungry” hormone. And the “feed me” hormone is saying it’s hungry for high fat and high carbohydrate foods. In other words, your body wants to eat junk food, not vegetables.

Even though the research shows the hormonal association with increased BMI, there may be other contributing factors. Chronic sleep deprivation makes one tired and may lead to reduced physical activity. Medical disorders, such as chronic pain, can interfere with sleep as well as some medications. Some people have rotating work shifts or work nights, both of which can lead to poor sleep.

Whatever the cause, adequate sleep is essential for good health and weight management. If you have difficulty with sleeping, check out these tips for good sleep hygiene.

- *Set a schedule for bedtime and awakening time.* Your body becomes accustomed to a routine and it's best to stick with it daily rather than depriving yourself of sleep on workdays and trying to catch up on non-workdays.
- *Avoid napping.* If you sleep too much during the day, chances are you won't sleep at night. If you must take a nap, limit it to 30 to 45 minutes.
- *Avoid alcohol and caffeine 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.* While alcohol may help you fall asleep, when your blood alcohol levels start to fall, there is a stimulant effect similar to caffeine.
- *Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.* These can affect your ability to stay asleep.
- *Get regular exercise.* Be careful not to exercise too close to bedtime because that can interfere with your ability to fall asleep.
- *Have a comfortable temperature for sleeping, keep the room ventilated, and block out noise and light.* Usually, a cooler room is better for sleeping.
- *Reserve your bed for sleeping and intimate activities.* Your bed is not your office or entertainment center. Leave the electronic gadgets and mobile phones in another room.
- *Turn off the TV, or better yet, don't have a TV in your bedroom.* Watching TV tends to keep you up later than desired and can stimulate the brain rather than relax it.
- *Practice relaxation before bed.* Deep breathing, meditation, yoga, chi gong, or tai chi can help relax muscles and slow down your brain.

If you want to get a general idea of how much sleep you are getting and the quality of your sleep, you might want to wear a fitness tracker. Most of the trackers will give you information about your sleep habits but keep in mind they tend to overestimate actual sleep time and cannot replace a sleep study.

Eat Smarter (and get more sleep)...

Vicki Bovee, MS, RDN, LD

Resources

Jones, JM. In U.S. 40% Get Less Than Recommended Amount of Sleep. December 2013. Retrieved from:

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/166553/less-recommended-amount-sleep.aspx>

Sanjay RP, Hu FB. Short Sleep Duration and Weight Gain : a Systematic Review. *Obesity*. 2008; 16(3): 643-653.

Taheri S, Lin L, Austin D, Young T, Mignot E. (2004). Short Sleep Duration is Associated with Reduced Leptin, Elevated Ghrelin, and Increased Body Mass Index. *PLOS Medicine*. 2004;1: 210-217.

University of Maryland Medical Center. Helpful Hints to Help You Sleep. July 2013. Retrieved from:

<http://umm.edu/programs/sleep/patients/sleep-hygiene>