



Importance of sleep for a healthy lifestyle

The importance of sleep

In our busy lives, sleep can be seen as less important than other activities. Many of us give up some sleep to catch up on other things like work, playing computer or late night TV. Getting less than 7 hours sleep per night has been linked to weight gain and increased stress. Just one or two nights of skipping sleep can make you have trouble concentrating and be irritable, moody and depressed.

How lack of sleep leads to weight gain

Sleeping fewer than 7 hours causes:

- An increase in hunger and appetite
- An increase in cravings for high carbohydrate, high kilojoule foods
- A slow down of metabolism so more fat is stored in your body
- Tiredness and lack of energy
- Increased levels of stress hormones
- Increases in insulin resistance that can lead to type 2 diabetes.

Ways to improve your sleep

Insomnia and other common sleeping problems are often caused by bad habits reinforced over many years. You can greatly improve your sleep quality by making a few small changes to your lifestyle and attitude towards sleep.

Work with your body clock

Getting a better sleep means working with your internal 'clock', not against it:

- Aim to get up at the same time every day. This strict routine will help set your body clock. You will find you get sleepy at about the same time every night.
- Feeling tired is our bodies signal to rest, listen to your body & go to bed when you feel tired.
- Avoid going to bed if you don't feel tired. Lying awake can reinforce bad sleeping habits.
- Spend some time outdoors in early morning sunlight. This helps to set your body clock.

Improve your sleeping environment

- Invest in a comfortable mattress
- Ensure sleep clothing, bedding and room temperature are comfortable
- Make sure the room is dark and quiet
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and intimacy. Avoid watching t/v or talking on the phone so you don't associate your bedroom with activity.



Adjust your lifestyle

Some other changes that may help you get a better sleep include:

- Avoid afternoon naps
- Use the last hour before sleep to relax your mind and body. Take a warm bath/shower. Avoid activities that are mentally stimulating.
- Avoid caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee, cola or chocolate close to bed time as these can stimulate the mind. Instead try a warm milky drink.
- Exercise every day, but not too close to bedtime.

Avoid drugs

Resorting to medications or drugs can lead to common pitfalls:

- Cigarettes contain nicotine which is a stimulant. Smoking before going to bed increases your heart rate and blood pressure. This is likely to keep you awake longer.
- Alcohol may help you doze off but it disturbs sleep rhythms. It prevents deep sleep so you won't feel refreshed in the morning. You are also likely to wake up regularly due to thirst or to go to the toilet.

- Sleeping pills should be used only as a temporary last resort and under strict medical advice. They have a number of drawbacks such as causing daytime sleepiness. Also after regular use, falling asleep without them can be even harder. Finding the cause of sleeping problems and dealing with this is a much better long-term solution.

Where to get more help

If you still have trouble sleeping do not hesitate to speak with your doctor. You may need referral to a sleep specialist. It may also help to record your sleep in a sleep diary to help you better understand common patterns or issues you may see with your sleep or sleeping habits.

Things I can do to improve my sleep:

1.

2.

3.

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist :
