



Weight Loss and Sleep



You may be wondering, “What does sleep have to do with losing weight?” It’s probably more important than you think!

Studies suggest that getting a good night’s sleep helps keep your metabolism up. When your metabolism is higher, you burn more calories, which helps you to lose weight.

On the other hand, poor sleep habits can lower your metabolism. This may be one reason why people who don’t get enough quality sleep have been shown to have an increased risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and yes, even weight gain. When you don’t get enough sleep, hunger increases because you produce more hormones that drive appetite and hunger.

Read on to find out if you’re really getting enough quality sleep. If you’re not, we have some steps you can take to help yourself sleep better. If you need more help, talk with your health care team. They will work with you to find other ways to improve your sleep.

Are You Getting Enough Sleep?

Many people who think they are getting enough sleep may not be. Adults usually need 7-9 quality hours of sleep per night. But nearly one in three adults report sleeping less than 6 hours per night.

Even if you think you’re sleeping enough hours, your sleep quality may be poor. If you are waking up frequently during the night, having trouble falling asleep, or waking up too early, you may not be getting a healthy amount of sleep.

Check each of the following that ring true for you **all** or **most** of the time:

- It is easy for me to doze off while reading or watching TV.
- I often doze off during long car rides.
- I feel sleepy during the day.
- It usually takes me more than 15 minutes to fall asleep.
- I wake up once or more per night.
- I have been told that I snore very loudly.
- I feel the quality of my sleep is unsatisfactory.
- When I try to go to sleep, I feel anxious or worry about whether I will be able to fall asleep.
- I do not feel sleepy when I get into bed.
- I get sleepy frequently during the day or have trouble concentrating because of sleepiness.
- When I have no plans the next day, I usually go to sleep much later than my normal bedtime.
- I feel groggy in the mornings for 30 minutes or more after waking.

If you checked any of these as occurring all or most of the time, you may not be getting enough quality sleep!

Improving Your “Sleep Hygiene”

Fortunately, there are things you can do to improve your sleep. Together, these are referred to as “sleep hygiene” practices. Just like regular hygiene, sleep hygiene is a set of habits that help you sleep “clean” and get a better-quality night’s sleep. You should set up a sleep hygiene routine that is as consistent as brushing your teeth at night.

Your body has learned to respond to your sleep environment based on your behaviors; over time these become habits. Without realizing it, you may have trained yourself to “unconsciously” associate your bedroom with whatever activities you typically do there. For example, if you watch TV in bed, you are training yourself to be alert and attentive while in bed. If you typically toss and turn for an hour or two before falling asleep, you are training yourself to be frustrated and sleepless while in bed. So, without intending to, you may have trained yourself to be awake in bed. But, the good news is, you can use this same learning process to train yourself to sleep better. Use the sleep hygiene practices to associate your bed with quality, restful sleep.

What are some examples of sleep hygiene practices?

- Keep the same bed/wake time throughout the week—even on the weekends!
- Establish a regular bedtime routine and follow it nightly.
- Avoid long naps during the day (for example, over 20 minutes).
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol for at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- Stay away from large meals before bedtime. Instead, have a light snack before bed—dairy products and turkey contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer
- Try not to drink fluids after 8 pm. This may reduce awakening due to urination.
- Get your most vigorous exercise done by the late afternoon. Relaxing exercises like walking or yoga can be done any time!
- Get plenty of exposure to natural sunlight to keep your body on a normal sleep-wake cycle.
- Don't let your pet sleep with you. Their movement may wake you, as could allergies to their fur and dander.
- Turn off electronics 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Keep your bedroom clean, cool, and dark.
- Use a fan or a white noise machine to block out unwanted noises.
- Use your bed for sleep and sex—no working, watching TV, or eating in bed!
- Get checked for sleep apnea (see below for more on this condition).

What are some sleep hygiene practices that you can start to apply tonight?

What If I Still Can't Fall Asleep?

Sometimes, even if we practice perfect sleep hygiene and are tired after a busy day, it can be difficult to fall asleep. In this situation, don't stay in bed and try to force your body to sleep.

Instead, get up and get out of the bedroom. Create a calm environment for yourself and engage in a quiet activity, such as reading, listening to music, or doing a crossword puzzle (but stay off your smartphone or computer!). Use relaxation exercises to calm any anxiety you may have about not getting a full night of rest. Don't go back to bed until you begin to feel tired.

Talk with Your Health Care Team

If your sleep difficulties persist more than a few weeks despite good sleep hygiene practices, we encourage you to talk with your health care team. They can suggest other therapies or treatments to help you sleep better. You may have a physical condition that is keeping you from sleeping well, or you may have another sleep problem that your care team can uncover.

For some people, especially those who are overweight, structures in the throat can partially block their air passage during sleep. This narrows the passage, and makes it hard to breathe. Sometimes, the entire air passage can become blocked. This is called sleep apnea.

Several treatments exist for sleep apnea. Losing weight can help improve the condition. Other treatments include wearing a mouthpiece, using a continuous positive air pressure (or CPAP) machine, and surgery. Your care team will help you decide the best course for your condition.



For sleep problems that aren't related to physical conditions, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia, or CBT-I, may be an option. CBT-I is a short-term therapy that targets thoughts and actions that can disrupt sleep. With CBT-I, you learn to manage anxiety associated with falling asleep.

Regardless of the reason for your sleep difficulties, it's important to take an active role when deciding on a treatment. Share your own preferences and goals with your care team. This will help you to work better together with your team to find a treatment plan that's right for you.

For a self-guided approach to managing insomnia visit https://www.mirecc.va.gov/docs/visn6/Improve_Your_Sleep_Self-Guided_Approach_for_Veterans_with_Insomnia-March-2017.pdf