

Sleep, Rest and Lose Weight this Holiday Season!

By Kathleen Tucker L.Ac., Dipl. Ac., C.Ht.

Having difficulty controlling your appetite? Are you stressed out, over tired and over-eating to compensate? You're not alone. Research indicates an intricate relationship between regular sleep, hunger and the ability to feel full. According to the latest research from the University of Chicago, "Sleep helps to regulate a small part of the brain called the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is involved in the secretion of hormones that regulate appetite". Eve Van Cauter, a University of Chicago sleep researcher, has done extensive research on two of these hormones that help regulate the hunger/satiation response in our bodies and guess what? The secretion of each hormone is directly proportionate to the amount of sleep an individual receives. The two hormones involved are ghrelin, which is responsible for the hunger response and leptin, which signals our brain that we are full. When we lack sleep, leptin is low and ghrelin is high. The result is hunger. This imbalance can become so strong that with chronic levels of sleeplessness, an individual can become ravenous, especially for high carbohydrate foods such as cakes, cookies and candy. In turn, these types of foods cause quick high spikes in blood sugar levels that are followed by a severe drop in blood sugar. An individual can become fatigued, foggy minded with a general feeling of lethargy and heaviness in their body. If the cycle of sleep deprivation is not broken, a viscous cycle of strong persistent hunger signals persists. Such a long term combination of sleep deprivation and bad diet may lead to other illnesses such as diabetes, digestive disorders, fibromyalgia, depression, and others. Since our bodies are dependent upon our food to nourish us, our sleep to replenish us, any abuse thereof may lead to disease of mind, body and spirit.

These research findings are of considerable concern to many Americans, since it is estimated that 63% of Americans adults do not get the recommended 8 hours of sleep a night, according to the National Sleep Foundation. In fact, the average adult gets 6.9 hours of sleep on weeknights and 7.5 hours on weekends.

Sleep deprivation alone can cause such an increase in appetite that studies reveal that people who sleep two to four hours a night are 73% more likely to be obese than people who get 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Those who get five or more hours of sleep a night are 50% more likely to be obese than normal sleepers. Those who sleep six hours are 23% more likely to be obese. In a final support of sleep, researches state that people who regularly get 10 or more hours of sleep are 11% less likely to be obese.

"It's amazing how much people's sleep is reflected in the hormones in their blood," says Mignot, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator at Stanford. Sleep in general effects the whole endocrine system: the system in our bodies responsible for hormones. During the quiet hours of sleep, our bodies go unstimulated by external factors. At this time the body can focus its energy on healing and replenishment. During the quiet moments cellular repair of damaged tissue transpires, the adrenal glands (the gland responsible for adrenaline) can rest, the heart can gently circulate blood-providing nourishment to all areas of your body. Sleep allows your lungs to breath rhythmically, unobstructed by stress and tension and the brain is free to float in and out of dreams, as it releases all consciousness.

Lack of sleep can prematurely age us. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, compared the DNA of 39 women who spent years caring for their chronically ill children to the DNA of women who had healthy children. The women with chronically ill children, the study found, had more wear on her DNA. The difference was so dramatic that the researchers estimated that the cells of the highly stressed moms had undergone the equivalent of 10 years of additional aging as compared to the low-stress group. “Older” cells, in turn, can be vulnerable to a host of diseases.

Getting enough sleep and controlling stress are powerful things that could have an impact on weight, states Louis Aronne, president of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity and director of the Comprehensive Weight Control Program at New York Presbyterian Hospital.

It appears that sleep could be the magic remedy for individuals wanting to gain control over cravings and overeating, especially during this holiday season when so many goodies are available and stress levels seem to be up. So grab a couple of extra hours of sleep, whether it be retiring an hour earlier at night or catnapping during the day. Live it up with rest, relaxation and rejuvenation. You can even tell your loved ones that you are following your highly disciplined weight loss regimen as you gently close your eyes and drift into sleep. ZZZZZZZ

Recommended hours of sleep vary by age and person. Some general guidelines are:

Toddlers (age 2 to 4)	12-14, including naps
Preschoolers (4 to 5)	11-13, including naps
Children (5 to 12)	10-11
Teens	8 ½ to 9 ½
Adults	7-9