

The "Dream" Diet....(why you lose weight during sleep?)

by Linda Fiverson

Do you ever go to sleep at night wishing you'd wake up thin? That all the "bad" food choices you made that day (and perhaps the days before) won't count? I bet you can't believe how *lucky* you are the next morning when you see that the number on the scale went down... Can dreams really come true?

The truth of the matter is we really do weigh less in the morning than at night. While we are asleep everything we ate and drank the day before is processed by our bodies. We eliminate a lot of water while we breathe and perspire. We lose even more the next morning when we urinate, which is something most of like to do before stepping on the scale...

Although water loss has an effect on weight loss, we can't depend on it for long term dieting results. But, we can remain hopeful. Recent studies suggest there is a correlation between the amount of sleep we get and how much we weigh. Data shows that dieters who got between six and eight hours of sleep per night had more success losing weight than those who got less than six hours.

The amount of sleep we get impacts the hormones ghrelin and leptin which control our appetite and cravings. Ghrelin is produced in the gastrointestinal tract and it stimulates appetite. It's the "Go" hormone saying, "Go eat more." Leptin is produced in fat cells and it sends a signal to the brain that we are full. It's the "Stop" hormone that says, "Stop eating." When we don't get enough sleep these hormones become imbalanced and aren't able to function properly. When we aren't well rested the levels of leptin drop and make us feel hungry. On the other hand, the ghrelin levels rise and stimulate our appetite.

Cortisol, the stress hormone is affected by sleep as well and it increases when we don't get enough. This, in turn, increases our desire for "comfort foods." Usually high in both, calories and carbohydrates, I am inclined to believe these foods bring us much more *discomfort* than *comfort*. When we're tired it always seems easier to eat (grab food) than to think about what we "should" eat. Adding stress to sleep deprivation is a definite recipe for failure.

Circadian rhythms have an impact on our sleep too. Controlled by our "master clocks," otherwise known as our biological clocks, they are the mental, physical and behavioral changes that respond to our 24 hour cycle, signals from the environment, and mostly, light. They can change our sleep-wake cycles, hormone release, body temperature, and bodily functions. As daylight ends our "master clocks" control the production of melatonin, a hormone that makes us sleepy. As daylight begins again, our "master clocks" send us signals to start waking up.

Most of us probably never dreamed that our success or failure to lose weight could be affected by our sleeping patterns. Yet it makes sense when you think about it. In one of the studies conducted, not only were the subjects' hormones askew but they also had

higher levels of body fat. Those who slept the fewest amount of hours per night had the highest weights. It isn't just about how many hours of sleep we get but how restorative the sleep is as well. Quantity and quality both count!

Not everyone just closes their eyes and goes to sleep. Some people struggle with insomnia and others have illnesses that affect their sleep. There are other situations that aren't so "cut and dry" too. When we fall asleep our throat muscles naturally relax causing them to get narrower when we inhale. Snoring occurs, and in some cases, sleep apnea, which is caused by fat build-up and poor muscle tone in the tongue and throat. Being overweight and/or having large tonsils and adenoids contribute to this condition. Sleep apnea is characterized by lapses in breathing while asleep and someone with this condition can suffer multiple episodes in a single night. He or she might report they had eight hours of sleep but with all the disruptions, it wasn't as solid or restorative as uninterrupted sleep. Those who suffer from fatigue and low energy levels due to sleep apnea or another condition are more likely to eat unhealthy diets and have weight problems than those who don't have disruptions in the sleep-wake cycle.

All this being said, not all researchers agree. Some of them think that the body's response to leptin is individual and that some of us might be more sensitive to it than others. They base this on other studies that were conducted showing that some obese people with apnea don't have the low levels of leptin associated with being overweight. Instead, their leptin levels are high. When their apnea is treated the levels drop and they then lose weight. They compare this to the way some obese people become insulin resistant and cite the possibility that some people with apnea are resistant to the fullness message that leptin sends to the brain.

Although the recent studies won't be considered conclusive until further research is conducted, they are interesting and suggestive. Certainly, if nothing else, we have all recognized how much better we feel after a good night sleep. The least we can do is maximize the amount of sleep we get if we aren't already getting between six and eight hours per night. Make a commitment to eating healthy and being physically active. It will lower your stress levels and help you sleep better. Learn to decrease distractions and turn off electronic devices at least an hour before you go to sleep. Try to establish a routine and put the lights out the same time every night and set the alarm for the same time every morning. Let your bedroom be the place you unwind and sleep.

We might never have really believed we could sleep away our pounds but think about the evidence that is pointing that way. Being thin might not be an impossible dream after all; it might be a dream come true. And with some effort, it can happen!