



Nightmare of too little sleep: It is tied to too much weight

by Nanci Hellmich | Nov 17 '04

LAS VEGAS -- If you want to lose weight, get more sleep.

That's the message from a large study being released today. It confirms earlier research suggesting that sleep deprivation promotes weight gain.

Researchers at Columbia University in New York looked back at sleep patterns and obesity rates among participants in the government's National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey from 1982-84 and then again in 1987. (More recent surveys did not look at sleep patterns.)

They examined the records of 6,115 people, ages 32-59. Participants were categorized by the amount of sleep they got each night. Those who slept for seven to nine hours were considered normal sleepers. The researchers didn't consider such factors as depression, physical activity and gender.

Among the findings being presented here at the annual meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity, in partnership with the American Diabetes Association:

* People who sleep two to four hours a night are 73% more likely to be obese than normal sleepers.

* Those who get five hours of sleep are 50% more likely to be obese.

* Those who sleep six hours were 23% more likely to be obese.

* Those who get 10 or more hours are 11% less likely to be obese.

"Getting more sleep actually had a protective effect against obesity," says lead researcher James E. Gangwisch. However, he points out that the study does not "prove cause and effect. It's an association."

This research confirms other studies of children and adolescents that show the same relationship between sleep and obesity, he says. Animal studies also show that when rats are deprived of sleep, their appetites go way up.

Researchers have theorized that lack of sleep may affect several hormones related to appetite and food intake, including leptin and ghrelin.

"Sleep deprivation activates a small part of the hypothalamus (region of the brain) that is also involved in appetite regulation," says Eve Van Cauter of the University of Chicago, one of the nation's leading sleep researchers.

Her study in November's *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* shows that sleep duration has a major impact on leptin. When people are sleep-deprived, their leptin levels are lower, which may cause the body to crave more food, she says.

"It looks like weight control can be added to the long list of benefits of getting adequate sleep," Gangwisch says.

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