



NO SLEEP MAKING YOU FAT?

Are you working late into the night and rising early? Perhaps you struggle to fall asleep or suffer from insomnia? According to recent studies your lack of shuteye could be causing havoc with your waistline! We investigate... **By Samantha Watt**

Forty winks and your waist

When you're trying to lose weight, it's all about limited portions, Best Food Choices and exercise, however according to Registered Biokineticists at Virgin Active, Catherine Viljoen and Leigh van Heerden, better sleep should be on the menu too!

Recent studies show that sleep deprivation could pave the way for weight gain and other negative metabolic consequences. This confirms the data that came from a study done in the 1980s where researchers found that people who averaged six hours of sleep per night were 27% more likely to be overweight than their seven-to-nine hour counterparts; and those averaging five hours of sleep per night were 73% more likely to be overweight.

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Catherine and Leigh explain that two recent studies, that were conducted at the University of Chicago in Illinois and at Stanford University in California, showed that less than six hours sleep a night over a long period of time can, in addition to reducing insulin sensitivity (and thereby affecting blood glucose regulation), increase ghrelin (a hormone that stimulates appetite), decrease

leptin concentrations and raise cortisol (a stress hormone) levels which causes one to overeat. In the Stanford study, those who slept less than eight hours a night not only had lower levels of leptin and higher levels of ghrelin, but they also had a higher level of body fat. What's more, that level of body fat seemed to correlate with their sleep patterns. Specifically, those who slept the fewest hours per night weighed the most.

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Petro Thamm, the only certified sleep consultant in South-Africa, adds, "Not spending enough time in a deep sleep means that your body does not release enough Growth hormone." She adds that Growth hormone stimulates cell regeneration, reproduction and growth, and is also known to build muscles. Conversely, the absence of the Growth hormone means that the metabolism slows down and less energy is burnt which makes one more susceptible to weight gain.

Forty wink foods

Petro Thamm says that you should eat:

- Food rich in Vitamin B6 (such as salmon, rice, garlic, pistachios)
- Food rich in Calcium (such as yoghurt, cheese, low-fat milk, pilchards)

Getting enough zzz's?

Take this quick quiz to see if you getting enough quality sleep at night...

1. Do you sleep for less than 6 hours a night?
2. Do you sleep in front of the TV, or with background noise?
3. Do you repeatedly press 'snooze' on your alarm clock?
4. Do you struggle to fall asleep at night?
5. Do you toss and turn and wake up wrapped in your blankets?

If you find that you have answered 'yes' to more than one of these questions then, you may need a 'sleep intervention'. Read further for strategies that inspire a good night's rest.

Simple tricks to extend your siesta into a good night's sleep

★ **Start exercising:** Catherine and Leigh advise that you start (and stick to) a workout routine as you will burn extra energy each day, which in turn will ensure that when you hit the sack, you will be ready to sleep.

★ **Don't exercise for up to four hours before bedtime:** "Regular exercise will improve your sleep, but it's best to train in the morning or early afternoon," explain Catherine and Leigh.

★ **Take a bath:** "Take a hot bath, shower or sauna before bed. When your body temperature is raised in the late evening, it will fall at bedtime, facilitating slumber," explain the experts at OTC Pharma.

★ **Reserve your bed for sleep alone:** Ensure that your bed is used simply for sleeping, and not for watching TV or doing work in, say OTC Pharma experts.

★ **Go to bed at the same time every day, even on weekends:** According Catherine and Leigh, "You can 'train' your body to follow a regular cycle of sleeping and waking."

★ **Increase your melatonin:** Scientific studies show that melatonin increases sleepiness, decreases restlessness, and reverses daytime fatigue. "The best way to increase these levels naturally is with exposure to bright sunlight in the day-time and absolute complete darkness at night," advise the experts at OTC Pharma. ■