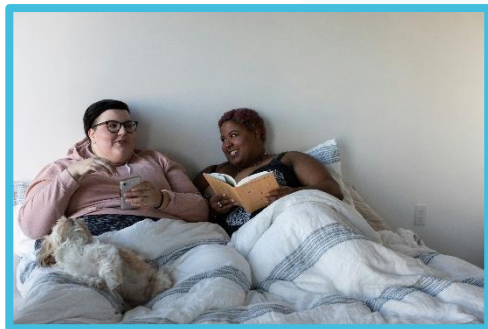


## Tip sheet

# Impacts of sleep on obesity

Our body weight depends on a number of different factors, including our general health, stress levels, genetics, income and, perhaps surprisingly, sleep.

Research shows that not getting enough sleep (or getting poor-quality sleep) can contribute to weight gain, while obesity in turn can impact our sleep. In either case, our mental health may suffer in turn, so it's important to understand both what is going on and what we can do to improve our outcomes.



## How sleep can affect our weight

### More time awake

Being awake for more hours of the day may encourage us to eat more often, including snacking between meals and eating before bed.

### Hormones

When we aren't getting enough sleep, our bodies produce hormones called leptin and ghrelin, which govern our appetite. This can make us feel hungrier during the day and increase our cravings for high-calorie foods.

It may also change our metabolism, meaning we process food in a less efficient way. This is especially true for night time eaters, as our metabolism slows down even more when we sleep.

### Tiredness

\* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6052856/>

When we're more tired, we're less likely to engage in strenuous physical activity, leading to more rest time and less exercise.

## How obesity can affect our sleep

While body positivity (or at least neutrality) is valuable for our wellbeing and self-esteem, obesity refers to a level of weight that is unhealthy for us.

### Some potential health complications include:

- joint or back pain
- elevated risk of cardiovascular disease or type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure and/or cholesterol
- increased snoring or sleep apnea.

### Sleep apnea

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) can be especially damaging to our sleep, as it leads to frequent waking during the night as the airway becomes obstructed and interrupts normal breathing. People with higher obesity levels are more likely to encounter sleep apnea, but weight reduction and the use of CPAP machines to regulate breathing at night can significantly improve sleep.

### Mental health

Obesity has also been shown to increase risk for various mental health conditions that may impact sleep, such as depression, anxiety and eating disorders.\* This may result from societal stigma and pressures against weight gain or hormonal changes in the body, but poor mental health can make it difficult to get to sleep in the first place and stay asleep throughout the night.

## Improving sleep and obesity in harmony

Improving our sleep and reducing obesity is best approached holistically, meaning we take a look at the whole situation and try to make adjustments from multiple angles.



### Prioritise sleep hygiene

Good sleep hygiene is essential for maintaining a healthy weight. Set a consistent bedtime, limit screen time before bed and create a calming routine to signal to your body that it's time to rest. A cool, dark and quiet room also promotes better sleep quality.

### Manage stress and anxiety

Chronic stress can lead to emotional eating and poor sleep. Engaging in relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing or journalling can help manage stress and improve both mental wellbeing and sleep patterns.

### Be mindful of diet

As we have touched on, poor sleep can lead to increased cravings for high-calorie, sugary foods. Eating a balanced diet rich in protein, fibre and healthy fats can help stabilise blood sugar levels, reducing late-night snacking and improving sleep quality.

### Hydrate strategically

While staying hydrated is important, drinking too much fluid before bed can lead to frequent bathroom trips that disrupt sleep.

### Exercise regularly

Physical activity not only supports weight management but also improves sleep and mental health. Even moderate exercise, such as a daily walk, can help regulate sleep cycles and reduce anxiety.

### Limit caffeine and alcohol

Caffeine can stay in your system for up to 6 hours, making it harder to fall asleep. And while alcohol may initially make us feel sleepier, it typically disrupts sleep later in the night.

By improving sleep, individuals can better manage weight and avoid obesity-related health risks. In turn, by managing body weight to a level that's healthy for each individual, we can support our sleep and benefit our long-term wellbeing.

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