



Snooze more, lose more

Getting enough sleep can really boost your slimdown.
And if that sounds like a tall order, we're here to help

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We all know that getting a restful and refreshing night's sleep is much easier said than done, especially in the summer months: feeling hot and sticky, tossing and turning all night, then waking early to bright light and the dawn chorus is not a recipe for successful shut-eye!

And when you've had a bad night, everything can feel like an extra struggle – especially making healthy food choices. Ever noticed that when you're sleep-deprived, you seem to feel hungry all the time, or you crave fatty, sugary foods? You're not alone. In a recent Slimming World survey, three out of four members say that their food choices are

affected by tiredness. More than a third (36 per cent) say they're less likely to cook from scratch, two-thirds said they eat more chocolate or sweets, and 36 per cent say they crave crisps or salty snacks.

Now, scientists think they may have cracked the reason why. They've found that lack of sleep might affect key hormones and brain chemicals that regulate the appetite and the way the body metabolises food. For example, as well as increasing levels of the hunger-stimulating hormone ghrelin, inadequate sleep may lower our levels of the 'full-up' hormone leptin, so we want to eat more than normal and need extra food to feel satisfied. This could help explain why people who regularly sleep for five hours or less are 15 per cent more

likely to have a BMI that falls into the obese category. Our survey bears this out: members with the highest BMIs report the most problems with sleep, and the biggest knock-on is on their eating. 'It can become a vicious circle – you eat more because you're tired, and the more your weight goes up, the more sleep problems you're likely to have, so the more tired you feel,' says Slimming World's head of nutrition and research, Dr Jacquie Lavin.

Even though we know sleep is a good thing, our busy lifestyles mean that getting enough of it can be tricky. According to a recent survey from the Royal Society for Public Health, 40 per cent of us have insufficient sleep, while one in five sleep poorly most nights. Many of us >

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under-sleep by an hour a night – that adds up to a whole night's missed sleep every week! 'So many of us just put up with poor sleep, but it's a foundation for good health and can help you on your weight-loss journey,' says Dr Jacquie Lavin. 'And just a few simple lifestyle changes can make a big difference.'

What exactly does a good night's sleep look like, though? Basically, we sleep in 90-minute cycles throughout the night, which break down in the following way.

Stage one lasts around seven minutes and is very light sleep, when we're easily woken up. Stage two is between 12 and 15 minutes of deeper sleep – when we might experience that sudden 'falling' sensation that jerks us awake.

Stages three and four bring more restorative sleep. Muscles relax; tissue growth and repair occurs; hormone levels are replenished; brain waves slow right down, and the body builds up energy ready for the next day. This 30-minute period is the one we tend to miss out on most when we cut back on sleep, and some studies have suggested that a lack of it is linked to weight gain.

Rapid eye movement (REM) is the final phase of sleep, when the brain is very active, the eyes dart back and forwards, our limbs become temporarily paralysed and dreams occur. It's thought this stage helps 'process' memories and improves brain performance

the next day. Certainly, a lack of it can make it difficult to concentrate and may impair memory. It's also thought REM sleep is suppressed by drinking alcohol – so it's no wonder we can feel like our IQ has plummeted overnight if we wake up with a hangover!

The good news is that not only is there something you can do to really boost the quality of your sleep – you've probably made a start already. Ok, so we can't promise to get the kids to sleep an hour later in the morning, or to stop the neighbours having yet another party. However, following a healthy lifestyle and losing weight are known to have huge benefits when it comes to sleeping better, for longer.

A third of members responding to our survey say the quality of their sleep has improved since joining Slimming World. And they put this down to weight-loss benefits such as: no longer going to bed feeling too full; not being woken up by their own snoring; being in less discomfort or pain; feeling less worried or depressed, and needing fewer night-time visits to the loo.

In turn, that means we have more energy during the day, and greater motivation to plan and prep healthy meals and find ways to stay

active. In fact, according to one study, sleeping well makes us 33 per cent more likely to be able to lose weight successfully.

So it's a win-win: snooze more, and you'll lose more (and vice versa!).

SNOOZE FLASH!

According to our survey, nine out of 10 members say a poor night's sleep has a big impact on their behaviours the following day. It affects:

How you shop: 52 per cent are more likely to buy on impulse; 39 per cent buy more unhealthy items than usual, and 28 per cent buy more convenience food

How you exercise: 48 per cent are less likely to be active

How you cook: 36 per cent are less likely to cook meals from scratch

What you eat: 75 per cent say their food choices are affected, and 31 per cent are more likely to eat more sugary or fatty foods for an energy boost

Tired-day tactics...

We all have nights when our sleep is interrupted, so it's good to have some strategies up your sleeve to stop yourself reaching for high-Syn snacks the next day. 'Research shows that lack of sleep can disrupt chemicals in the brain's reward centre,' says Slimming World's head of nutrition and research, Dr Jacquie Lavin. 'So you not only

crave foods high in fat and sugar, you also get more pleasure from them and want to eat even more.' Here are Jacquie's survival tactics:

- Go high-fibre for sustained energy: start the day with wholemeal toast or porridge oats, and opt for a jacket potato, baked beans and mixed salad at lunch.
- Plan ahead: batch-cook

healthy meals that are easy to heat up when you're too tired to cook.

- Stock up on easy-to-grab, on-plan snacks like Free yogurts, fresh berries, lean cooked cold meats, seafood sticks and chopped veg.
- If you need an energy boost, head outside for a 10-minute walk, then see if you're still hungry when you get back.

Good night!

Time for bed? Tuck yourself in with our sleep-tight guide

Keep a cool head

Research shows that keeping your head temperature down while you sleep may slow down brain activity and improve sleep quality. Get some fresher air by sleeping with your window open – or if that's not practical, invest in a fan.

Don't be afraid of the dark

Even a dim light in your bedroom (from a smartphone, clock radio or TV standby button) can inhibit the release of the sleep hormone melatonin, confusing your body clock and keeping you awake for longer. If you can't completely block out all light, sleeping with an eye mask could help.

Ban screens from the bedroom

Using a tablet or e-reader last thing at night can disrupt your body clock, too, so you take longer to fall asleep and find it harder to wake in the morning, according to a recent US study. This is because they emit a wavelength of light known as blue light, which is particularly powerful at inhibiting melatonin and throwing out our sleeping patterns.

Cut back on booze

Even a small amount of alcohol can interfere with the normal sleep process. Stick to one or two drinks in the early evening, then switch to something non-alcoholic – like a relaxing herbal tea if you're at home.

Resist the weekend lie-in

A consistent routine is best for sleep, which means going to bed and getting up at the same time – even on Sundays! Long lie-ins on the weekend disrupt the sleep cycle, leaving you with 'social jet lag' on Monday morning, and increasing your risk of being overweight, according to new research by the Medical Research Council.

Get physical

People sleep better if they do moderate exercise for 150 minutes a week (around 20 minutes a day, or 30 minutes five times a week). Just one more great reason to get moving more and aim for your Gold Body Magic award...