



**Michael J Breus Ph.D.**  
Sleep Newzzz

# Weight Loss and Sleep: Is There a Connection?

It's important to keep the sleep-weight connection healthy.

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Over the years, I've treated hundreds of patients who struggle with both sleep issues and weight issues. Many of them are women. From patients, I often hear: "I'm not [sleeping](#) well. And I can't seem to lose the extra weight." In my second book, *The Sleep Doctor's Diet Plan*, I discuss how sleep affects [appetite](#), digestion, and metabolism. There are some pretty powerful connections between [sleep and weight](#)—and improving sleep can be one important tool in maintaining a well-functioning [circadian rhythm](#) and a [healthy weight](#).

During several interviews, I've been asked, "Are sleeping pills the new diet pills?" I thought this was an odd question, but put into context, what people were really asking was: "If I have [insomnia](#) and it is preventing me from losing the weight I want—which increases my [anxiety](#) and prevents me from sleeping—and I take a sleeping pill to get 6-8 hours of sleep, will that be helpful and healthy?"

The answer to that question lies in one keyword: *healthy*.

I was disturbed to read recent news about a [diet fad](#) that involves using sleeping pills and **excessive sleeping** to lose weight (not sleeping a normal amount, as described above). The article suggests that this diet fad—which is being called [narcorexia](#)—is "new." But I'm not so sure. Even a quick look at websites where people talk about eating disorders suggests that these practices may have been around for a while, under the radar. Whether this is a new trend or one that's escalating, it's both shocking and worrisome.

**Let me be clear, using [sedatives](#) to trigger weight loss—essentially by sleeping through parts of the day when one might otherwise be eating meals—is unhealthful and downright dangerous.** There's virtually no part of mental or physical [health](#)—from mood to [cognition](#) to immunity to cardiovascular health—that isn't put at risk by these practices.

With this in mind, it seems like a good time to review the fundamentals of the relationship between sleep and weight, and how healthy sleep habits can make it easier to [maintain a healthy weight](#) and make healthy food choices.

## How sleep can affect weight and weight loss

Sleep can be used safely and responsibly to help facilitate good health and healthy weight maintenance. That includes losing weight if needed. The "trick" to using sleep to help manage weight isn't really a trick at all: It's about getting enough sleep (but not too much) and making sure your sleep is high quality and restful.

Let's look at some of the scientific evidence. There are several ways that sleeping poorly, and not sleeping enough, can make staying at a healthy weight more difficult:

***Sleeping poorly, or not enough, slows the body's metabolism.*** Metabolism is the process by which the body converts calories to energy. Research suggests that poor sleep makes the body's [metabolism](#) work less effectively, leaving more un-expended energy to be stored in the body as fat.

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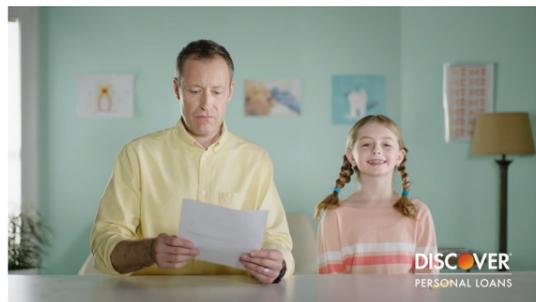
**Poor sleep increases appetite.** Not getting enough sleep, and [sleeping poorly](#), leads to changes in [hormones](#) that regulate [hunger](#) and feelings of fullness. Short on sleep, levels of the hormone ghrelin, which stimulates hunger, rise. At the same time, levels of leptin, a hormone that promotes feelings of fullness, go down. Poor sleep is also linked to changes in [serotonin](#) levels. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that has a great influence on both [mood and appetite](#). High cortisol, which triggers a need for serotonin, may be one of the things that makes you CRAVE fat and carbs, because they lead to a release of serotonin.

**Poor sleep can make it harder to make healthy food choices.** Studies show that when people don't get enough [high-quality sleep](#), their cravings for sugar, fat, and starchy carbohydrates increase. People who sleep poorly may also be more likely to [snack late at night](#). Consuming too many calories in the evening hours can make weight control more difficult since it appears that [calories consumed at night](#) are more likely to be stored as fat, instead of burned for energy. Disrupted and short sleep also increases [stress](#), which can trigger unhealthy eating habits.

There's a reason why sleep and health experts focus so much attention on the links between sleeping too little and weight issues. That's because there is an epidemic of insufficient sleep in our society. Estimates vary, but studies and polling suggest that as much as 40 percent of U.S. adults get less than 7 hours of [sleep per night](#)—that's the minimum recommended amount of sleep. Americans' [sleep](#) has been in decline for decades—and that decline has been mirrored by alarming increases in [obesity](#), as well as metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes.

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### Oversleeping can be harmful, too

The truth is, sleeping too much has negative effects on health and well-being—and may also contribute to weight problems. Research suggests there's a link between too much sleep and [weight gain](#). As with too little sleep, there is a greater [risk of obesity](#) among people who sleep too much.

The risks and problems associated with oversleeping go well beyond weight gain. Too much sleep is linked to a number of health problems, including:

- Problems with [cognition](#), including [memory problems](#)

- [Body pain](#)
- Increased risks for [heart disease](#) and [stroke](#)
- Greater all-cause [mortality risks](#)

**Sleeping 12, 15, even 20 hours a day to avoid eating and trigger weight loss is hazardous to health in the short and long term.** In addition to all the other risks associated with oversleeping, this kind of excessive sleeping—targeted around mealtimes—will deprive the body of the essential fuel (calories) it needs and the activity that supports a healthy body, from muscles and bones to heart and lungs.

Deliberate oversleeping can also throw the body’s bio clock and [biorhythms](#) completely off course. Remember, our daily biorhythms regulate and control nearly every aspect of the body’s functioning, from our immune systems and metabolism to our cognition and mood, our appetite and [sex](#) lives. Staying on a healthy [sleep routine](#)—for most adults, that’s seven to nine hours a night of high-quality rest—is critical to keeping the body’s biorhythms in sync and functioning properly.

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```
a = (100 + 1.0/3) - 100;
b = 1.0/3;
// True or false?
a == b
// Why?
```

 Below the code is a green button that says "TAKE THE QUIZ & GET OFFERS FROM TOP TECH COMPANIES" and the Triplebyte logo at the bottom.

Healthy sleep fuels a balanced, healthy lifestyle

If you or someone you know struggles with an [eating disorder](#), the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) offers resources to find treatment and support. Sleep is a powerful force in our live and a critical tool for health and well-being. Sleep should only be used in the service of good health.

If you know someone who you think could benefit from this information please pass it on!

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### About the Author



**Michael J. Breus, Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychologist and a diplomate of the American Board of Sleep Medicine. He is the author of *Beauty Sleep*.

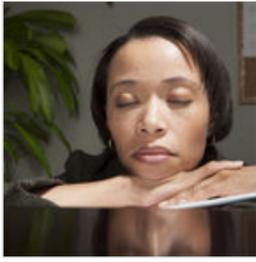
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