



Sleep

Sleep can help you shed the 'COVID-15'

If you've stepped on the scale lately, the number that appeared might have surprised you.

For many, the coronavirus pandemic disrupted fitness routines and led to stress eating and restless nights. This brought on extra pounds popularly referred to as the "COVID-15."

Your sleep habits can help reverse this weight gain. While you're asleep, your body is busy regulating and releasing hormones that impact your appetite. It's also recharging for the next day. Here's how this can impact weight:



Worries keeping you awake?

Sometimes thoughts about the day's events rattle around in your brain long after your head hits the pillow.

When that happens, use these tips to calm the clamor and get the rest you need:



Establish a routine: Wind down for about half an hour before you go to bed. Some options: Read a book, take a bath, dim the lights, have caffeine-free tea, or listen to soft music.



Make a list: Before you get into bed, make a list of things to do tomorrow. This way you won't worry about forgetting to do them.



Take some deep breaths: In bed, inhale for a count of three and exhale for a count of three. To make sure you're taking deep breaths, put your hand on your belly and feel it rise and fall.



Meditate: Download a meditation app and use the guided prompts to let go of anxious thoughts. ♦



Less sleep = More hunger

When you're sleep-deprived, you produce more of the hormone ghrelin. This hormone tells you to eat more.

Less sleep = Fewer stop signals

The hormone leptin tells you to stop eating. You have less of this hormone when you don't get enough sleep.

Less sleep = Carb cravings

When you're sleep deprived, you produce more cortisol. This is the chronic stress hormone, and having more of this in your system increases cravings for foods rich in fat and sugar.

Less sleep = Less control

You're more likely to make impulsive decisions when you're tired. This makes it tougher to reach for healthy foods.

Less sleep = Less energy

When you're tired, you may be less likely to be active.

To help your body get rid of excess weight, develop good sleep habits. This will help you regulate hunger, avoid high-calorie foods, and have the energy to be active. ♦



Do these 5 things today to sleep better tonight



Be cautious with evening eating.

Having a big meal or eating spicy foods right before bed is a recipe for discomfort. It can cause heartburn, which disrupts sleep. If hunger hits at night, reach for a light, healthy snack like popcorn (with very little salt and butter), yogurt with fruit, or a small turkey sandwich.



Make time for exercise.

Moving more during the day will make you more tired at night and will help you sleep better. For some people, exercising right before bed makes it tough to fall asleep. If nighttime exercise is having this effect on you, switch your routine so you're more active earlier in the day. If nighttime is your best option for exercise, try walking, or another workout that's less vigorous.



Avoid afternoon caffeine.

An afternoon cup of regular coffee can keep you from falling into a deep sleep at night. This hurts overall sleep quality. Switch your afternoon beverage of choice to decaf coffee, herbal tea, or a nice, cool glass of water.



Turn off electronics.

The National Sleep Foundation notes that using a smartphone, TV, laptop, or tablet before bed messes up your internal clock. Your body doesn't produce the melatonin that helps you feel drowsy. Switch off electronics half an hour to an hour before bed and grab a book or magazine instead. You could also use an e-reader or another device that doesn't produce blue light.



Establish a regular bedtime and wake time.

This supports your body's internal clock. Adjust your schedule so you get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. ♦



Don't let your drowsy driving be someone's nightmare

The next time you're tempted to keep driving when you're tired, consider this: A person who's driving when drowsy can be just as impaired as someone who's drunk.

Just as with drunk driving, drowsy driving can have tragic consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates it may cause up to 6,000 fatal crashes each year.



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health points to five primary causes of driver fatigue:

- ① Being awake for many hours in a row,
- ② Not getting enough sleep over several days,
- ③ Monotonous tasks and long periods of inactivity,
- ④ Health factors (sleep disorders or medications causing drowsiness), and
- ⑤ Driving when you're likely to feel the urge to sleep (usually this is during the early morning hours).

If you're on the road and start becoming fatigued, pulling over for a 20-minute nap and some caffeine will give you a short-term boost. This isn't the ideal solution, however.

Planning ahead so you're well rested before getting behind the wheel is the best way to avoid drowsy driving. Get seven to eight hours of sleep before driving.

If you're planning a long trip, split the driving with a buddy. Switch drivers every two hours and nap when it's not your turn to drive. ♦

By the Numbers

The dangers of drowsy driving

Drowsy driving = Impairment

Impairment after **17 hours** awake = Impairment with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of **.05**.

Impairment after **24 hours** awake = Impairment with a BAC of **.10**.

The legal BAC limit for driving is **.08**.

Deadly choice

As many as **1 in 5** fatal crashes involve driver fatigue.

Source: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



Next Month's Topic:

Cold, Flu, and COVID-19