

HealthTalk: Lack of Sleep and Weight Gain

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Q: Can lack of sleep really lead to weight gain?

A: Many, but not all, studies do show a link between lack of sleep and increased chances of being overweight among children and young or middle-aged adults. There may be several reasons for this. It's possible that people who are overweight or obese are more likely to have lifestyles that include less sleep, whether because of working jobs with long, late hours or extended television viewing, for example. However, some research suggests that lack of sleep (usually referring to less than six or seven hours a night in adults) can lead to choices that make weight control a challenge, such as when fatigue causes us to be less active or grab extra sweet drinks and snacks, or when staying up longer hours simply means more time to eat. There are studies suggesting that lack of sleep can even lead to hormonal changes that increase appetite and the depositing of fat around the waist. Not everyone's weight seems equally affected by lack of sleep, but if you're short on sleep and gaining weight, getting to bed earlier may bring a variety of health benefits. Naps can also boost health, but so far no link has been found to weight control.

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The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field, and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is part of the global network of charities that are dedicated to the prevention of cancer. The WCRF global network is led and unified by WCRF International, a membership association which operates as the umbrella organization for the network. The other charities in the WCRF network are World Cancer Research Fund in the UK (www.wcrf-uk.org); Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands (www.wcrf-nl.org); World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong (www.wcrf-hk.org); and Fonds Mondial de Recherche contre le Cancer in France (www.fimrc.fr).