

# When weight loss helps with sleep

April 10 2018

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Carefully managed weight loss has been linked to improvements in obstructive sleep apnoea, a common problem that contributes to a range of short and long-term health issues.

Preliminary results from new research at the Flinders University

Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health has shown that a combination of behavioural changes, along with losing excess kilos on a scientifically developed meal replacement, can reduce the worst effects of sleep apnoea.

"Our project looked to address the vicious cycle of inadequate sleep and feeling too tired for exercise and improve eating habits that usually comes with chronic sleep apnoea," says respiratory and sleep physician Dr. Carissa Yap, who led last year's trial.

"Participants in our six-month study found the Flinders behavioural program (known as the 'Flinders Program') in tandem with a balanced meal replacement product such as Impromy (developed by CSIRO) is effective for weight loss.

"In turn, we then monitored whether the weight loss helped to reduce the symptoms of participants' sleep apnoea."

Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) is a common sleep disorder that causes breathing to repeatedly stop and start during sleep. It can cause morning headache, daytime sleepiness and fatigue, irritability and high blood pressure, also increasing a person's chances of stroke, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and even depression.

For the study, researchers recruited 40 overweight adults aged between 18 and 70 who suffer from moderate to severe OSA and who experience at least mild daytime sleepiness.

Participants started with a [body mass index](#) (BMI), or the standardised calculation of your height and weight, of 30 or more, then progressed through a six-month program incorporating the option of losing weight with the help of a high-protein meal replacement and support with the Flinders Program, a long-term self-management care plan.

"OSA is a big problem and contributes to many short and long-term health issues," Dr. Yap says. "While helping to reduce OSA effects, weight loss may also have a greater benefit on cardiovascular risk than CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) devices."

CSIRO Research Dietitian Dr. Jane Bowen, who was part of the scientific team that helped develop Impromy, says people are often motivated to stay on the diet because they start seeing results quickly.

"We know from our clinical trials of Impromy that many people start seeing a positive reduction in their cholesterol, blood pressure and blood glucose quite early in the program," Dr. Bowen said.

"The new findings from Flinders University further demonstrates the health benefits of weight loss."

Dr. Bowen says meal replacement shakes such as scientifically validated Impromy can be a safe and effective way to lose [weight](#), particularly when they provide personal support through pharmacies across Australia.

As well as six months of [weight-loss](#) support, incorporating the option to use free high-protein meal replacements, the program offered patients a thorough assessment and adopt a long-term self-management care plan.

The Flinders Program, developed by Psychiatry experts at the Flinders Human Behaviour and Health Research Unit, is used by a large number of health professionals in Australia and other countries to enable patients to self-manage their chronic disease.

Along with access to the intensive behavioural support techniques and Impromy meal replacements, the research project also offered advice from dietitians, exercise physiologists and support groups.

Obstructive [sleep apnoea](#) (OSA) and obesity are very common and intrinsically linked health problems that affect millions of Australians, and place a huge burden on our healthcare system. In 2014–15, 27.9% of adult Australians were obese (body mass index [BMI]  $\geq 30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>), with a further 35.5% being classified as overweight (BMI = 25–29.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>).

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) treatment is safe and effective, reduces sleepiness, and improves mood and quality of life; however, the cardiovascular benefits of CPAP are uncertain.

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: When weight loss helps with sleep (2018, April 10) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-04-weight-loss.html>

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