

Bad sleep, bad diet... bad heart?

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(HealthDay)—It's a dangerous equation: Poor sleep triggers a bad diet, and the two can equal a higher risk for obesity and heart disease in women, a new study contends.

"Women are particularly prone to sleep disturbances across the life span, because they often shoulder the responsibilities of caring for children and family and, later, because of menopausal hormones," said study senior author Brooke Aggarwal, an assistant professor of medical sciences at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons.

The researchers analyzed the sleep and eating habits of an ethnically diverse group of nearly 500 women, aged 20 to 76.

Similar to previous studies, this one found that women with worse overall sleep quality consumed higher amounts of added sugars associated with obesity and diabetes.

Women who took longer to fall asleep had higher [calorie intake](#) and ate more food by weight, and women with more severe insomnia symptoms consumed more food by weight and fewer unsaturated fats than those with milder insomnia.

"Our interpretation is that women with [poor quality sleep](#) could be overeating during subsequent meals and making more unhealthy food choices," Aggarwal said in a university news release.

The study was published online recently in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

"Poor sleep quality may lead to excessive food and calorie intake by stimulating hunger signals or suppressing signals of fullness," said study co-author Faris Zuraikat, a postdoctoral fellow at Columbia.

"Fullness is largely affected by the weight or volume of food consumed, and it could be that women with insomnia consume a greater amount of food in an effort to feel full," but "it's also possible that poor diet has a negative impact on women's sleep quality," he said in the release.

"Eating more could also cause gastrointestinal discomfort, for instance, making it harder to fall asleep or remain asleep," Zuraikat explained.

"Given that [poor diet](#) and overeating may lead to obesity—a well-established risk factor for [heart disease](#)—future studies should test whether therapies that improve sleep quality can promote cardiometabolic health in [women](#)," Aggarwal said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [sleep and chronic disease](#).

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