

The less you sleep, the more you eat

1 June 2015



Credit: xiaphias/Wikipedia

Factors influencing food intake have, and continue to be, a hotly contested subject. A new paper published today in the SAGE journal, *Journal of Health Psychology (JHP)*, suggests that disrupted sleep could be one factor contributing to excessive food intake and thus leading to long term chronic health damage in both adults and children.

In a special issue on Food, Diets, and Dieting, the paper explores how a bad night's [sleep](#) - something that affects millions of people worldwide - can affect eating habits and behaviors. Though it is well-known that a bad night's sleep can affect our ability to perform daily duties, what is less known is how disrupted sleep can influence both our food choices and intake.

"It is well recognized that food intake is implicated in many chronic health issues including obesity, diabetes and heart disease, and diet is often a target of treatment to prevent the onset of these conditions", commented the researchers Alyssa Lundahl and Timothy D Nelson of the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, USA. However, they continued: "understanding the mechanisms linking disrupted [sleep patterns](#) to increased food intake is important for informing both prevention and treatment

interventions for [chronic health conditions](#)."

Food intake is driven by biological, emotional, cognitive and environmental factors. Though diet is important to consider in the treatment for chronic health disorders associated with food intake, a closer look should be given to how sleep affects these factors. Lundahl and Nelson argue that these mechanisms are heavily altered and influenced by sleep patterns. For example, after a bad night's sleep, the hormone controlling appetite is affected, emotional stress is greater, more food is desired to compensate for lack of energy and impulsivity is increased, all of which affect the amount of food that you would consume in a day. They conclude:

"Health psychologists should be mindful of the link between sleep and eating, and sleep should be actively considered in efforts to modify dietary behavior."

Dr David Marks, editor of JHP, stated:

"The research stimulated by Lundahl and Nelson has important treatment implications for health conditions often treated with dietary interventions and illustrates the need for research to empirically examine the underlying mechanisms of [food intake](#). It is important for people to be aware the findings of this study so that if they suffering from lack of sleep, they can take greater care to consider the quality and quantity of food that they are consuming."

More information: The article "Sleep and food intake: A multisystem review of mechanisms in children and adults", Alyssa Lundahl and Timothy D Nelson, published in the *Journal of Health Psychology*, will be free to access for a limited time and can be read [here](#).

Provided by SAGE Publications

APA citation: The less you sleep, the more you eat (2015, June 1) retrieved 20 January 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-the-less-you-sleep-more.html>

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