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Sleeping the fat away

You are a "doer." You understand how important exercise and eating right are to reaching your fitness goals and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. You find time to attend Jazzercise classes and juggle work and/or family responsibilities all week long.

As a "doer," you may find that you have to get up a little earlier or go to bed a little later to get it all done. I am as guilty as anyone of trying to squeeze some extra time into my day early in the morning and especially late at night. Pretty soon it becomes routine for the recommended 8.3 hours a night to turn into six or less.

Lack of sleep has many easily recognizable side effects - lack of energy, slower cognitive processing, stimulant abuse (including caffeine) and reduced motor skill coordination. But for those who are working on reducing their body fat, there is a hidden enemy. Lack of sleep can literally make you fat.

Much of the current research in fat loss is breaking away from the traditional models of simply burning calories and the macro nutrients (fats, carbohydrates and proteins) ingested. This is not to say that burning calories is not important. Instead, the research is getting better refined and looking at a more comprehensive picture of fat utilization and storage.

The role of hormones is moving to the front lines in our fight against fat. Two hormones in particular play an important role in controlling your appetite and your feeling of fullness.

- **Ghrelin** stimulates your appetite, causing you to eat.
- **Leptin** suppresses your appetite so you'll stop eating.

Equally important is that it stimulates energy expenditure.

The two hormones are released on and off in a properly functioning brain to regulate normal feelings of hunger. But research has shown that sleep deprivation can alter ghrelin and leptin levels. Therefore, lack of sleep will lead you to eat more. And the foods that you choose will be the ones that produce an initial feeling of satiation (fullness), which tend to be highcarbohydrate foods.

Research also shows that sleep deprived individuals have reduced tolerance to glucose (sugar). So lack of sleep causes you to eat more glucose than your body can properly metabolize for energy purposes. Instead it is eventually stored as fat.

The primary hormone responsible for lean body mass and fat regulation is the growth hormone. This hormone is produced by the pituitary gland and is most active during our deepest levels of sleep.

And what does lack of sleep mean to future generations? In a study that examined the relationship between sleep duration and overweight risk for third-grade and sixth-grade children, researchers from the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital discovered that children who got fewer than nine hours of sleep each day were more likely to be overweight, regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, or quality of life at home.

Sleep is our fundamental form of recovery. Our bodies need this time for restoration, both mentally and physically. It's more than an indulgence. It's a necessity.

Here are a few simple suggestions to help you make sleep a priority:

1. Don't go to bed unless you are sleepy. And don't fight sleep if you are sleepy.
2. Begin a nightly ritual that tells your body and mind that it is time to get ready for sleep.
3. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
4. Keep work out of the bedroom. Don't mix business with pleasure.
5. Avoid caffeine after lunch.
6. Vigorous exercise should take place 4-6 hours before bedtime.
7. Never look at the clock in the middle of the night. It makes you more anxious about not sleeping.
8. Avoid using foods and drinks for "pick-me-ups."
9. Keep your bedroom cool.
10. Don't go to bed hungry but avoid large meals close to bedtime.