

Sleep Your Way Thin

Are you getting enough sleep? Have you ever thought that burning the midnight oil is actually making you fat? It's true. The fact is that if you are sleep deprived, you are also depriving your body of the opportunity to recover and provide the right environment to support your efforts to lose those extra pounds.

Often times, lack of sleep will cause stress for the body. In times of stress, the body's reaction is to release 'cortisol'. This is a powerful hormone that increases body fat, especially that fat around the mid-section that so many of us are trying to reduce.

In healthy, rested individuals, human growth hormone (HGH) is released in the body about every 45 minutes, but most HGH is released in the deepest levels of sleep. Growth hormone has an important effect on your metabolism. Efficient HGH production decreases body fat and increases lean muscle. If you aren't getting the correct amount of sleep, your body never gets into the deepest levels of sleep and you produce less HGH. As we age, we naturally produce less HGH, so it's important that we maximize HGH production to receive any benefits from it in terms of staying healthy.

Sleep is often seen as a luxury rather than a necessity for healthy living. Many people are over scheduled. What seems to be undervalued and shrinking from the day-timer is valuable rest. Studies show that those that regularly get less sleep have an increased chance of obesity. Healthy sleeping habits are as important as proper eating and exercise.

Here are a few tips on developing and maintaining a good bedtime routine:

- Avoid caffeinated products later in the day.
- Avoid alcohol as a sleep aid.
- Avoid heavy exercise right before bed.
- Avoid long mid-day naps as this interrupts the 24 hour sleep cycle and can affect the quality of sleep you have at night.
- Develop a routine to help the mind and body slow down before retiring.
- Make your room as dark as possible as this will increase the secretion of melatonin which helps you to get into the deeper stages of sleep.
- Maintain a regular schedule as much as possible. Late nights and sleeping in on weekends can throw off your body clock.
- Exercise regularly and maintain sensible eating habits.

You may surprise yourself at how much better you feel with regular sleeping habits. There's also the added benefit of more energy to devote to all your other pursuits, including your fitness and weight loss goals. I'm convinced that some people don't know what they're missing or don't know how good it feels to be truly rested. It's a sad reflection on our 24/7 society that devoting 7-8 hours a night to the pillow is seen as wasteful-but that's a topic for another day.

By Shawna Kaminski

Shawna can be found catching regular z-z-z's every night. Check out how she's helping others meet their health and fitness goals at www.calgarynbootcamp.com.