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SLIM WHILE YOU SLEEP

Is sleep the key to staying your ideal weight and looking fabulous?

BY ALICIA POWER

When it comes to feeling nurtured, loved and happy it is amazing what a good night's sleep can do for you. Emotions are settled, anxiety is calmed, the body lowers toxic stress hormones – and you lose kilos!

One of the most important (and overlooked) effects of a good night's sleep is self-esteem. Ladies – are you taking this in? Here's why. If your brain has had the time to figure out its problems during sleep, it switches off those chemicals that otherwise have you in stressed 'fight or flight' mode during the day.

And it is those very stress chemicals that can quickly start the downward spiral towards anxiety, poor health and – weight gain.

Sleep is the key to staying your ideal weight and looking fabulous!

In a nut shell, sleep keeps your moods happy, keeps your body relaxed and in good health and – most amazingly of all, it keeps your heart happy.

Having enough sleep and especially enough of the *right kind* of sleep keeps your body relaxed because chemicals are released in deep sleep that help balance your moods. Toxins are flushed out of the liver and kidneys and your brain's electric pathways (synapses) are cleared of anxiety and clutter.

SLIM WHILE YOU SLEEP

For those of you who would love the ultimate slimming program – where you don't have to do a THING and still lose weight – here it is: You can actually get slimmer simply by ensuring your body receives all the sleep it needs.

Science has shown that the hormonal balance in the body is enhanced through those golden hours of deep rest. And it is hormones, ladies and gentlemen, that send the correct signals throughout the body to stimulate or stifle its urges.

One of those urges many of us are familiar with is the craving to eat carbohydrates, and sweet or fatty foods.

Here's the wonderful secret about sleep: the hormone, Leptin, tells the brain that the body has enough fatty tissue. Through different experiments scientists have found that when the body is starved of sleep this hormone is sharply reduced in the body.

Ladies – when you don't get enough sleep, your body thinks it needs to put on weight and starts looking for calorie-rich foods.

In 2004, researchers at Stanford and Wisconsin universities used 1000 volunteers in a study that reported that by staying up too long we could trigger our metabolism in favour of gaining weight.



YELO. NY'S NEW SLEEP SALON

When you don't get enough sleep, your body thinks it needs to put on weight

EMOTIONAL RESCUE

When we sleep we dream (particularly during the REM – Rapid Eye Movement – phase), it is now understood that dreaming is a process during which we are revisiting and sorting emotions, learning experiences and problems.

It is during this phase that we integrate and more deeply understand our emotional reactions.

You may be aware that stress can be caused through misunderstanding others or even ourselves! Through a simple lack of information or experience we can project anxious thoughts towards a person or project.

Here's a simple example: say your partner is having problems at work and decides not to trouble you with them. Your instincts tell you something is wrong and because you are tired and stressed you are feeling down already. You were up in the wee hours of the night trying to finish an important project. Your mind is slower, you are feeling more sensitive than usual and your annoyance threshold is low. Your self-esteem is lowered and you decide their mood is about you.

Of course, after a brief chat with your partner you would soon realise your mistake. There's just one problem – your mind is so foggy from the late night and your emotions are on a razor's edge. You can imagine the outcome.



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Emotions are immediately engaged when we feel stressed, particularly for women. Something to keep in mind is that emotions trigger hormonal reactions, and vice versa, hormones can trigger our emotions. Our glands secrete these powerful chemicals that regulate a vast number of body systems, keeping them in balance.

It is the hormonal highways in the body that are directly affected by stress – as well as by lack of sleep. A specific hormone can trigger the need for more calorie-rich foods. Similarly your body produces hormones that signal the need to store fluid – as many women observe during menstrual cycles and with menopausal symptoms.

Many years ago, a friend mentioned she noticed when she relaxed on holidays – without changing her diet – within a short time she appeared slimmer. To her this was a mystery she enjoyed!

RELAXATION – THE ULTIMATE HEALER

Here is the mystery revealed... relaxation – particularly deep sleep relaxation – can switch on hormonal secretions that re-balance the body to its natural healthy state. During deep sleep the stress hormone Cortisol is also lowered. Ongoing stress can raise Cortisol levels causing symptoms such as dehydration, which in turn triggers a fluid-retention cycle.

Many women are mystified as to why their bodies stay 'overweight' even when they cut back on fattening foods. It is because during our waking hours we may still be experiencing challenges and stress that place our body chemistry on emotional survival alert – triggering on-going high levels of Cortisol.

Imagine not having any worries, any stresses! Imagine the optimal hormonal balance our bodies would enjoy. Imagine no more holding body fluid because of emotional or mental stress. This certainly is an important, if not new, thought.

Let's talk about the idea of 'extra' sleep here. You may already be getting adequate sleep – the experts talk about between seven and nine hours as being the right amount. However, your daytime life may still be stressful and emotionally disturbing. The result can de-stabilise your hormonal balance, triggering weight gain and pushing you into a self-destructive low self-esteem cycle.

For example, many women feel emotionally sad when their partnerships lose intimacy – when they feel cut off from their partner's heart. This can cause deep, sometimes hidden, emotional stress. This stress can translate into weight gain

when their body's hormones interpret the below-the-surface grief as an emotional emergency. In this circumstance your hormones (Leptin) can trigger cravings, or lower adrenalin or noradrenalin levels causing depression and lowered motivation making you chronically less active and prone to weight gain.

In this type of situation taking time out for extra sleep during the day can make a profound change in your body chemistry, self-esteem and general psychological health – as well as help to heal your relationship!

It is during these extra one- to two-hour siestas that your body is given the chance to relax deeply, enabling the REM deep sleep reaction of recognising emotional patterns and subliminally coming to conclusions and clarity. The sleep stabilises your hormones and your more relaxed state calms down your body chemistry.

Using deep sleep therapy, your subliminal mind relaxes from survival mode and lowers the fight or flight chemicals (such as Cortisol) in your body. This immediately tells your body that it can cancel its perceived emergency need to store body fluid or body fat.

Remember: this type of high stress 'survival' body/mind state is the underlying cause of many on-going physical symptoms that can develop into serious ill health. [See side-box over the page] Sleep directly relaxes unconscious stress through its ability to integrate and process problems and anxiety.

Sleep, therefore, has many benefits: it sorts out mental stresses which in turn relaxes emotions, in turn supporting the body's balance, health and optimal appearance.

So sleep is extraordinarily important in creating a healthy, balanced vibrant body and mind. No wonder many European and South American countries have an afternoon siesta! They've known this all along!

SLEEP THE NEXT SPA TREND

The enormous value of sleep has recently become obvious to many people in high stress cities who work hard to squeeze the last drop out of their daily productive hours.

The bartering of an alert (often coffee-fueled) productive mind with a gradual lowering of immunity, lowered emotional intelligence and an out-of-balance hormonal state is driving many high achievers, as well as many chronically stressed people, to seek out additional restorative sleep on top of their usual amount.



METRONAPS,
NEW TO AUSTRALIA

Sleep is becoming the new therapy offered in Spas

SOME SLEEP FACTS...

Sleep consists of two main sleep phases – REM and non-REM cycles. REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep is characterised by intense brain activity and vivid dreaming. REM begins about 90 minutes after falling asleep and increases in the latter part of the night. This type of sleep is important for better daytime performance, emotional integration, sequential learning and memory capacity.

Non-REM sleep has four distinct stages moving from light to very deep sleep. The deep sleep stages of non-REM sleep are characterised by low-frequency electrical waves called 'Slow Wave Sleep'. This is the deepest and most restorative sleep: blood pressure drops, breathing is slower, energy is regained, and hormones are released for growth and development.

Each of these sleep states alternates every 90 minutes and getting enough of both these states is important to receive the full benefit from quality sleep.

HORMONAL DAMAGE

Sleep deprivation and insomnia can cause you to put on weight as well as lead to other serious health issues.

Weight gain is triggered as lack of sleep lowers secretion of the hormone Leptin (appetite suppressor) and increases levels of Ghrelin, a hormone that increases food intake (appetite stimulant). Ghrelin is also thought to play a role in long-term regulation of body weight. Also with not enough sleep the body becomes less glucose tolerant creating conditions for Type 2 Diabetes.

Lack of sleep or emotional stress stimulates an increase in Cortisol (the stress hormone). Studies have shown that Cortisol may play a role in the development and worsening of cancer and other conditions. Increased cortisol levels also promote the development of insulin resistance, a risk factor for obesity and diabetes.

Lack of sleep can also lower the production of the hormone melatonin. Melatonin has antioxidant properties, plus it lowers oestrogen production from the ovaries. Lowered levels of melatonin may expose women to high levels of oestrogen and may increase the risk of breast cancer. For more information go to www.sleepcentre.com.au

To answer this need, sleep is becoming the new therapy being offered in Spas, health clubs and hotels around the world.

In New York, at a new sleep salon, Yelo, stressed-out New Yorkers can cocoon themselves in a Yelocab, a private hexagonal pod fitted out with a luxurious leather reclining chair, a Nepalese cashmere blanket and soothing sounds and lighting.

Also in New York (the city that never sleeps!), is the Sleep Spa which features MetroNaps, providing customers with scalloped high-tech hibernation cocoons. The good news is that MetroNaps Cocoons (www.metronaps.com.au) have just arrived on our shores, so look out for them in your favourite Spa and prepare for a leisurely catch-up snooze.

Nap facilities are popping up at exclusive Spa destinations around the world. You can indulge in restorative sleep programs at the celebrity hang out – the Canyon Ranch Spa in Arizona, USA – and in the UK you can visit the Snoozebooth in Central London's Cucumba Spa; the non-residential Royal Spa in Tunbridge Wells, Kent has a 'bedroom' and the very exclusive Spa at Pennyhill Park in Surrey has launched a Spa Sleepover Night where clients select a pillow from the pillow-menu and sleep on hand-made mattresses.

According to Spa Finder, the US-based Spa travel expert, sleep is predicted to be the top Spa trend this year. President, Susie Ellis says, "There was a threefold increase this year in our website user requests for information on Spas with sleep programs. As well as sleep education programs, Spas are offering lounges for post-massage naps and many Spas are encouraging guests to have a lie-in, rather than get up at dawn for a hike." Research at the London College of Fashion indicates that Sleep Spas will become mainstream within the next five years.

Without good-quality sleep our lives can turn to chaos.

So if you feel overweight, check your sleep patterns. Also check your emotional gauge that might alert you to feeling stressed. (Dig deep because it may be hidden!) This can be a key first step to changing body shape and general body wellbeing.

One thing to keep in mind: physical symptoms such as being overweight or having fluid retention rely strongly on deep states of relaxation to re-balance. Remember, emotions govern our body's responses, and deep relaxation, such as deep sleep, has been proven to heal and calm that emotional rollercoaster. So, sleep long and deep and slim while you sleep! 🌀