

[IMAGE]

Less Sleep, More Weight

By Editorial Staff

Two major health issues are facing an increasing number of young people, particularly our preteen / teenage population: poor sleep and excess weight. That's the problem; the solution is linked to the fact that the first actually contributes to the second. Let's take a look at new research that suggests we can help our children maintain a healthy weight just by ensuring they get a good night's sleep more often.

Adolescents who sleep fewer than eight hours a night on a consistent basis are more likely to be overweight or obese, according to a multi-year study that evaluated sleep habits among more than 1,200 children (average age at baseline: 12). Wearable activity trackers were used to track sleep at three age points: 12, 14 and 16, with participants categorized into three groups based on amount of sleep: very short sleepers (fewer than seven hours), short sleepers (7-8 hours), and optimal sleepers (eight hours or more).

Very short sleeping was most likely at ages 12 and 14, with a corresponding 21 percent and 72 percent higher likelihood, respectively, of being overweight or obese. Short sleepers were also more likely to be overweight or obese compared to optimal sleepers: 19 percent and 29 percent more likely at ages 12 and 14.

Interestingly (particularly for parents who may be thinking, *But my child always gets enough sleep*, per the study, only about one in three adolescents slept at least eight hours a night at age 12, and the percentages dropped with age: less than one in four at age 14 and less than one in five at age 16. This is important for two reasons:

1. Too many kids aren't getting enough sleep, which can affect much more than weight, including academic performance, mood, etc.
2. According to this study, kids who got the most sleep also enjoyed higher-quality sleep (less waking up at night / higher percentage of time spent in bed sleeping).

While you're worrying about getting your child more sleep, keep in mind that while this particular study didn't address it, the same seems to hold true for adults: less sleep = more weight ... not to mention numerous other health issues, particularly if your poor sleep habits become chronic.

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