

Kids, Sleep, and Obesity

From toddlers to teens, when kids don't get enough sleep, they're cranky, whiny, and difficult. Of course, adequate sleep has many other benefits for children. Chief among these is the role that sleep plays in obesity prevention.

Hours of Sleep and Obesity:

Research shows that kids who sleep less at night are twice as likely to be overweight or obese compared to those who sleep longer (1). Teens who got less sleep had greater increases in Body Mass Index (BMI) between the ages of 14 and 18, particularly those who started out with higher than average BMIs (2).

Hours of Sleep and Dietary Intake:

Less sleep may impact children's food choices. For Danish 8-11 year olds, one hour less sleep was associated with a higher intake of added sugar and sugar-sweetened beverages (3). Five year olds with shorter sleep duration rated higher in "food responsiveness," which reflects the urge to eat when you see, smell, or taste palatable food (4). A small study found that when teens were allowed to sleep only 6.5 hours per night, they ranked sweet/dessert foods as more appealing and ate more servings of these foods than when they slept 10 hours per night (5).

Bedtime and Obesity:

Late bedtime, regardless of sleep duration, appears to contribute to children's risk of obesity. Preschoolers with early weekday bedtimes (at or before 8 p.m.) were half as

likely as those with late bedtimes (past 9 p.m.) to be obese as adolescents (6).

Electronic Devices and Sleep:

A large study of Canadian fifth-graders found that nighttime use of and access to electronic devices was associated with shorter sleep duration, excess body weight, poor diet quality, and lower physical activity levels (7).

The Bottom Line:

Parents can give their children the edge in obesity prevention by:

- Establishing an early bedtime, and sticking to it on weekdays and weekends.
- Keeping electronic devices out of the bedroom. (Hint: turn off the wi-fi at night and keep everyone's phones in one location at bedtime.)
- Setting a good example by showing your kids that a good night's sleep is important for everyone.

By Hollis Bass, MEd, RD, LD

For more details and a list of references, visit <https://foodandhealth.com/kids-sleep-and-obesity/>.



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