

eat well, sleep well, fight fatigue

Many of us know it's important to aim for a healthy diet and include activity and exercise in our routines to support our overall health. Sleep, on the other hand, is an often neglected part of a healthy lifestyle, especially as life seems to get ever busier but our days don't get any longer! Add in the demands of shift work, moving from days to nights or working 12-hour shifts, and forming healthy sleep habits can feel impossible. Getting enough good quality sleep is essential to looking after both our physical and mental wellbeing, here we focus on this vital part of our lifestyle.

According to the RSPH report *Waking up to the health benefits of sleep*, there's a wealth of evidence to conclude that lack of sleep and poor sleep are inherently bad for our health.

Working night shifts goes against our natural circadian rhythms of getting up when the sun is up and going to sleep when it's dark. For some, working at night can lead to lower alertness, cognitive function, psychomotor coordination and mood, with this reaching the lowest point between the hours of 3am and 5am. Trying to sleep during the day can then be difficult due to being out of sync with the light and noise around us. Lack of sleep then has a knock-on effect, including an impact on how able we are to make healthy food and activity choices and our ability to manage our weight.

how sleep impacts on appetite, activity & weight

When you haven't had a good night's rest, everything can feel like an extra struggle, particularly when it comes to making healthy food and activity choices. So how does sleep impact?

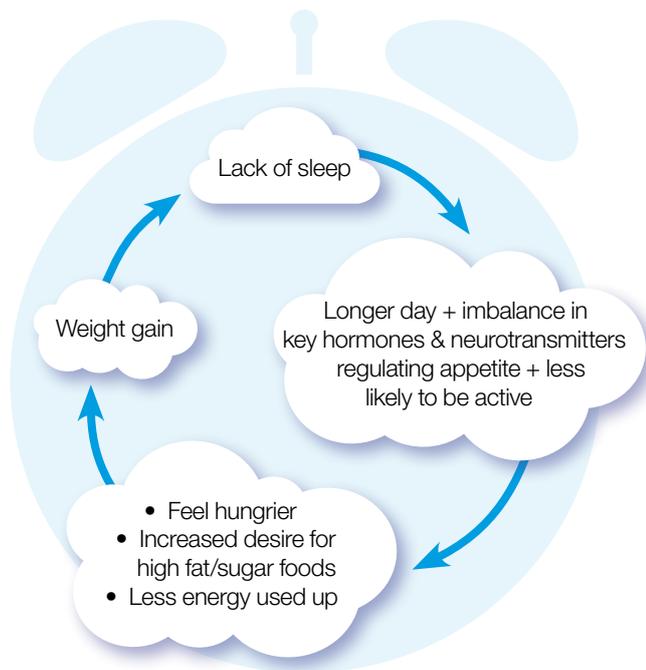
Not getting enough sleep:

- Disrupts key hormones such as leptin, ghrelin, cortisol and growth hormones, which help us regulate appetite and fat metabolism.
- Impacts on neurotransmitters which stimulate reward centres in the brain. This increases the desire for food and eating gives us more pleasure, driving us to eat more.
- Leads to tiredness, which can mean we're less likely to be active, decreasing our energy expenditure, and therefore making weight management more challenging.
- Often leads to more sedentary behaviours such as watching TV, which can in turn be linked to increased snacking.
- Means you'll be awake for longer, giving you more time to eat, and as you're tired, it makes it more likely you'll reach for foods high in sugar and fat.
- Can create a vicious cycle. Research involving Slimming World members showed that those with a higher BMI report they get less sleep and are more likely to have sleep problems, which can affect their food choices the following day. For example, making them more likely to reach for sugary foods for an energy boost, choose high calorie convenience food and less likely to cook from scratch.



Working together to support the
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it's a vicious sleep cycle!



The good news is it's possible to break the vicious cycle between lack of sleep and unhealthy eating behaviours and weight gain. There are actions you can take to help you get better sleep, keep active, plan in your food choices, protect your weight and feel at your best for your shifts.

- Many (38%) members report an improvement in sleep quality after losing weight with Slimming World
- They also report their sleep is now less likely to be affected by problems such as discomfort from feeling too full, snoring, and a frequent need to wee.

Here are some sleep-tight solutions:

- Plan your caffeine intake carefully. Caffeine breakdown is very individual and may affect your ability to sleep.
- Enjoy a walk, swim or other activity after your shift to help with winding down – research shows gentle, moderate activity can help you sleep better.
- Try to avoid eating a large meal too close to bedtime.
- Studies suggest lower fibre and higher intakes of fat and sugar can negatively affect sleep quality. Instead, opt for snacks after your shift which are fibre-rich and low in fat and sugar, such as reduced fat houmous and sticks of cucumber, carrot and red pepper; or Ryvita topped with chicken tikka pieces, a dollop of fat-free natural yoghurt and some finely chopped tomato, cucumber and red onion.
- Try to establish a regular bedtime and waking up routine where possible – understandably this is much more difficult when juggling a varied pattern of day and night shifts so don't put too much pressure on yourself to get it 'perfect' (remember: any sleep is better than none).
- Cut back on booze before bed. While alcohol can cause drowsiness, it effects the quality of sleep later in the night, so though you might fall asleep quicker, it can lead to a restless night with poorer sleep overall.
- Keep screen time to a minimum in the bedroom. Aim to put your phone and other electronic devices down as far in advance of going to sleep as possible. The glare from the screen delays the release of melatonin which promotes falling asleep, and your brain is more likely to stay alert and active rather than relaxing.



tired day tactics

Whether you regularly work shifts or not there will always be nights when you sleep less well than you'd like. Be prepared for those times with these top tips:

lack of sleep/tiredness
can lead to:

activity
taking a
backseat

get prepared by:

using foot out of the door strategies:

- Take your gym bag to work so you can head straight to your chosen activity on your way home.
- Have your trainers by the front door.
- Plan in a short walk round the block – once you get started you may find you can keep going. Making a date with a friend to take part in an activity can help you stick to your commitment.

impulse buying
at the
supermarket

planning your shopping trip:

- Write a shopping list before you go.
- Have a healthy snack or meal before you go shopping so you're less likely to pop extras in the basket.
- Look for ideas for quick and easy recipes and draw up a meal plan for the week.

less likely to
cook from
scratch

getting ahead:

- Batch cook meals such as curries and chilli when less tired and store extra portions in the freezer (you'll be grateful for having a healthy prepped meal ready when the tiredness hits!).
- Have key ingredients to hand in the kitchen for quick and easy filling meals like tinned tomatoes and dried pasta for a quick pasta dish, or mixed frozen veg and rice to serve with grilled fish or chicken.

turning to
sugary and fatty
food for an
energy boost

choosing filling meals and snacks:

- Enjoy regular meals containing some slow release carbs – for instance, a bowl of porridge or high-fibre cereal; a jacket potato with the skin on and plenty of salad; and something filling and comforting for an evening meal, such as wholegrain pasta topped with a chunky vegetable sauce or a fragrant lentil dahl.
- Keep plenty of healthy snacks to hand, such as fresh fruit, low fat and low sugar yoghurt, dried fruit and nuts, or boiled eggs.

With some of these tips and tricks up your sleeve, you can break out of the vicious cycle, enjoy a better night's sleep and tuck into tasty, healthy meals.

For more delicious recipes to support energy levels visit slimmingworld.co.uk.

For more information on sleep visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep and view the RSPH report on sleep here www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/wellbeing/sleep.html

Further information about the RCM Caring For You Campaign and resources can be found at www.rcm.org.uk/supporting/getting-help/caring-for-you



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