Looking for Links Between Sleep Patterns and Obesity

While many experts believe that weight gain and obesity are caused chiefly by too much eating and too little physical activity, additional factors may help explain the dramatic increase in obesity worldwide.

Recent reports suggest that disruptions in sleep patterns in children may be linked to today’s round-the-clock lifestyle, caused in part by increased sedentary entertainment options like video games, television and the Internet. Such nonphysical activities have been associated with increased body fat and altered metabolism.

Abnormal sleep/wake patterns may change circadian clocks that normally allow cells to anticipate variations in the outside environment, such as changing levels of nutrients (glucose, fatty acids and triglycerides) and hormones such as insulin.

By Alfredo Flores

What Can I Do to Avoid Gaining Weight When I Quit Smoking?

To avoid gaining weight when you quit smoking, you need to become more physically active and improve your eating habits before you stop. Physical activity helps to control your weight by increasing the number of calories your body uses. Making healthy changes to your eating habits will prevent weight gain by controlling the amount of calories you eat. Try to reduce your chances of gaining weight by being more physically active and improving your eating habits before you stop smoking.
Become More Physically Active.

Becoming physically active is a healthy way to control your weight and take your mind off smoking. In one study, women who stopped smoking and added 45 minutes of walking a day gained less than 3 pounds. Try to do at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day on most days of the week. The activity does not have to be done all at once. It can be done in short spurts -- 10 minutes here, 20 minutes there -- as long as it adds up to 30 minutes a day. Simple ways to become more physically active include gardening, housework, mowing the lawn, playing actively with children, and taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Improve Your Eating Habits.

Try to gradually improve your eating habits. Changing your eating habits too quickly can add to the stress you may feel as you try to quit smoking. Eating a variety of foods is a good way to improve your health. To make sure you get all of the nutrients needed for good health, choose a variety of foods from each group in the Food Guide Pyramid each day. The Nutrition Facts Label that is found on most processed food products can also help you select foods that meet your daily nutritional needs. For a healthy diet, use the Pyramid to guide your daily food choices and make sure you:

😊 Eat plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits.
😊 Choose lean and lowfat foods and low-calorie beverages most often. Choose lowfat dairy products, lean meats, fish, poultry, and dry beans to get the nutrients you need without extra calories and fat.
😊 Choose less often foods high in fat and sugars and low in nutrients.

Bitter SWEET News

Study Reignites Aspartame Concerns

Just when you thought you could sip your diet soda with impunity, a new study reignites the controversy surrounding aspartame. One of the most commonly consumed sweeteners, marketed variously as Equal and NutraSweet, aspartame has been determined safe by the FDA except for those suffering from phenylketonuria (a rare genetic disorder).

However, a new Italian study found an increased incidence of leukemia and lymphomas among aspartame-fed rats. Data was obtained from a previous experiment in which 25,000 rats consumed aspartame over the course of their life spans (about 3 years). Post-mortems revealed adverse effects for daily doses of 20mg/kg -- the human equivalent of drinking 3-4 cans of diet soda a day. This is less than half of the current acceptable U.S. daily intake established by the FDA.
Before you throw out anything and everything containing aspartame (found in 6,000 products worldwide), bear in mind that the FDA maintains its current position that aspartame is safe. What’s more, a National Cancer Institute (NCI) human study, also published in September, found no link between aspartame intake and leukemia or lymphomas in an analysis of dietary data for over 500,000 subjects.

Both studies have their critics. The anti-aspartame camp complains that the NCI study was too short (follow-up was only 5 years). Skeptics of the Italian study recall how the case against saccharin collapsed when further research revealed that humans and mice did not share the same metabolic pathways that had led to cancerous results for the rodents.

If you do require an artificial sweetener as part of your weight-management routine, check out the Dole Nutrition Institute’s “Look at Low-cal Sweeteners” for more information about studies regarding their health impact.

---

**Healthy Recipe**

**Zucchini Chips**

**Ingredients:**
1/4 cup dry breadcrumbs  
1/4 cup (1 ounce) grated fresh Parmesan cheese  
1/4 teaspoon seasoned salt  
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
2 tablespoons fat-free milk  
2 1/2 cups (1/4-inch-thick) slices zucchini (about 2 small)

**Preparation:**
Preheat oven to 425°.  
Combine first 5 ingredients in a medium bowl, stirring with a whisk. Place milk in a shallow bowl. Dip zucchini slices in milk, and dredge in breadcrumb mixture. Place coated slices on an ovenproof wire rack coated with cooking spray; place rack on a baking sheet. Bake at 425° for 30 minutes or until browned and crisp. Serve immediately.

**Yield**
4 servings (serving size: about 3/4 cup)

**Nutritional Information**
CALORIES 61(28% from fat); FAT 1.9g (sat 1g, mono 0.5g, poly 0.2g); PROTEIN 3.8g; CHOLESTEROL 5mg; CALCIUM 87mg; SODIUM 231mg; FIBER 1g; IRON 0.6mg; CARBOHYDRATE 7.6g

Linda Oldenburg, *Cooking Light*, AUGUST 2005
The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service is an educational agency funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, North Carolina State University, and local governments. The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service’s mission is to help individuals, families, and communities put research based knowledge to work to improve their lives.

Four major program areas:
Agriculture and Natural Resources
Community & Rural Development
Family & Consumer Education
4-H & Youth Development

The use of trade named products is with the understanding that no endorsement is made to the exclusion of other equally effective products.

Compiled and edited by:

Marcie Schaffer
Extension Agent
Family and Consumer Science

Secretarial support by Cheryl Mitchell