

WORDS AMBER BRYAN



SLEEP Yourself Slim



As well as leaving you exhausted, a bad night's sleep could be stopping you from losing weight, says personal trainer Amber Bryan

IF YOU'RE CURRENTLY trying to get fitter, shift some body fat and feel healthier, the chances are you're exercising more and changing your eating habits. But unless you also look at other aspects of your life as well, you may find that your efforts are not generating the desired results.

Most people don't realise the huge role that sleep in particular plays in your overall health, but getting enough rest is crucial, both in the form of 'rest days' (where you don't exercise at an intense level) and in the form of good quality sleep. In fact, scientists have discovered that you can double your chances of reaching your target weight if you get between six and eight hours sleep a night. What should be apparent from the list below is that it all

If you don't get adequate sleep, you may find that you suffer from the following:

- Increased blood pressure
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Low energy the next day, meaning you're more likely to skip your workout or, at best, have a poor quality workout
- Low leptin levels, which make you crave sugary foods
- High ghrelin levels, which make you more hungry
- Reduced levels of growth hormone, responsible for muscle growth and cell renewal
- Increased cortisol levels, which increases hunger
- Upset in the body's ability to metabolise carbohydrates and cause high levels of glucose in the blood, leading to insulin overproduction and, as a result, more storage of unwanted body fat

comes down to managing your hormones. The stresses of modern living and the fact that sleep deprivation is commonplace mean that our hormones are often a mess.

This isn't to provide everybody with an excuse as to why they're struggling to lose weight, but rather, it should be a wake-up call to get you focusing on a more holistic approach to your health.

There is now an abundance of scientific evidence to support the link between poor sleep quality and weight gain – recent studies published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *The Lancet* and *The International Journal of Obesity*, among others found that sleep deprivation can increase hunger and affect the body's metabolism, which in turn, makes it more difficult to lose weight, so individuals who lose sleep may continue to feel hungry despite adequate food intake.

In order to improve your sleep, you need to understand the role of four key hormones:

1 Leptin: This is produced during sleep. It regulates appetite and tells your brain when you're full. So the less you sleep, the less leptin you produce, and the more you eat as your body doesn't know when it's full.

2 Ghrelin: The hunger hormone. This stimulates the brain to increase appetite. High levels of ghrelin also mean you're less likely to feel satisfied after eating. More sleep means lower ghrelin which means reduced appetite.

3 Insulin: The fat storing hormone. This metabolises sugar and turns it to fat. Insulin is released from the pancreas whenever you consume sugar and most of the body's insulin receptors are around your middle, which is why we tend to store fat around the 'love handles.' Insulin resistance could also contribute to an increased risk of diabetes.

4 Cortisol: The stress hormone. This metabolises macronutrients (fat, protein, carbohydrate). Sleep deprivation causes an increase in stress to the body which leads to high cortisol levels, meaning a slower metabolism. High stress levels have been shown to increase fat deposits around your middle.

5 Growth hormone: A protein that helps regulate the body's proportions of fat and muscle. When we don't sleep enough, we don't produce enough growth hormone, which means our muscles don't get a chance to recover from a workout. So you could be putting in all the effort at the gym, but ruining your efforts and not getting the results simply because you haven't allowed your body enough rest. Growth hormone will increase muscle mass and as we know, muscle is far more calorie-hungry than fat, so the more lean tissue you have, the higher your base metabolic rate will be and the easier you'll be able to lose weight and keep that weight down.

Finally, it's not just total number of hours slept that is important. Our bodies are designed to rest when the sun goes down and work and play when the sun comes up. Before we had electricity, Mother Nature intended for us to go to sleep shortly after sunset. As such, our bodies have evolved to get the most benefit from sleeping between the hours of 10pm and 6am, and our body carries out most of its detoxification and cell regeneration between 9pm and 1am.

So there you have it, getting some rest can help you get slim – but even if you don't need to lose weight, adequate sleep will dramatically improve how your body functions, and will set you on the path to optimal health. ●●

Amber Bryan runs personal training company Love Fit Training
www.lovefittraining.co.uk