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Can you lose weight while sleeping?

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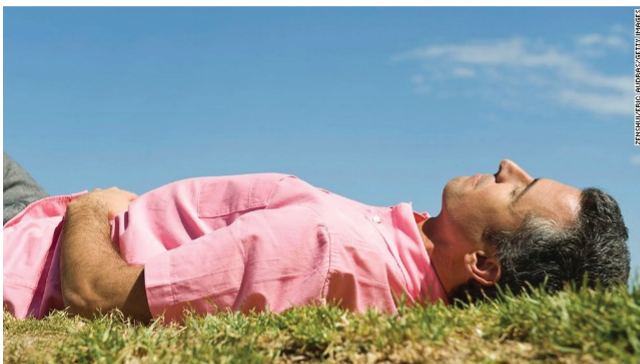
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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Unfortunately, sleep alone won't lead to significant weight loss
- But proper sleep can help you avoid excess weight gain
- Less sleep can lead to hormonal imbalance and feelings of hunger

Editor's note: *upwave is Turner Broadcasting's new lifestyle brand designed to entertain the health into you! Visit upwave.com for more information and follow upwave on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram @upwave.*

(upwave.com) -- The rumor: You can drop pounds by catching Z's

The not-so-secret way to lose weight is to eat less and exercise more, right? Well, according to some, sleeping -- that's right, catching more Z's -- can help you shed pounds. So, should you swear off the gym in favor of more time snoozing under the sheets?

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The verdict: Proper sleep can help you avoid excess weight gain and, over time, lose weight. But if you're looking to drop 10 pounds by the end of the month, sleep isn't your answer.

You might think that the more hours you're awake, the more calories you're burning, so you should be losing more weight. But you'd be wrong.

In fact, people who don't sleep enough at night risk gaining extra pounds, not losing them, according to John M. Jakicic, director of the Physical Activity and Weight Management Research Center at the University of Pittsburgh.

"I think poor sleep is a contributing factor to weight gain," says Jakicic. "When you have poor sleep or lack of sleep, you're setting a whole cascade of events in motion

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Sleep and health

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hormonally that could set you up for weight gain."
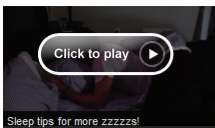
upwave: Are you prone to weight gain?

Less sleep = Less energy

Hormones that regulate growth and appetite are part of the equation, according to Jakicic, but equally culpable is sleep sabotage. He believes that the more you're awake, the greater the chance you'll have an extra snack or two (or three or four).

A 2013 study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences supports that theory. It found that people who don't get enough sleep are more likely to be hungry because the body needs more energy to stay awake. Unfortunately, sleepy eaters tend to consume more than enough to compensate, which leads to weight gain.

"People who are well rested don't slog through the day," says Jakicic. If your body is worn, you're not going to be bounding up the stairs to your office, and you might be less motivated to make it to the gym. Less physical activity means fewer calories burned which, over time, can lead to weight gain.

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Sleep can curb hunger

If you're not sleeping well at night, you may be causing hormonal imbalances that could be making you feel hungry when you don't really need to eat.

"The appetite hormones leptin and ghrelin are made predominantly during sleep, which means that people have less of a sense of satiety if they're not getting enough sleep," says Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, author of "Real Cause, Real Cure: The 9 Root Causes Of The Most Common Health Problems And How To Solve Them." That hormone-triggered lack of satiety could explain the 3 a.m. munchies.

Your growth hormones are also to blame, according to Teitelbaum. "When you sleep, your body is hard at work building muscle and repairing and rejuvenating tissue. The less sleep you get, the less time your body has for these critical processes."

And since the more muscle you have, the higher your metabolism, not sleeping enough could be affecting how effectively your body burns through calories. "You (won't) have as much muscle if you're not getting enough sleep," he says. "You'll actually wind up with more fat and less muscle."

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More sleep doesn't equal diet-level weight loss

So if you suffer from insomnia, restless leg syndrome, fibromyalgia or any other sleep or pain disorders that can make shut-eye elusive, seek treatment. And yes, if you're on a diet, getting quality, restful sleep can help you shed pounds, but it'll take awhile.

If you're properly rested, "(you're) going to find that it's easier to lose weight," says Teitelbaum. "It's going to be gradual over time. You're looking at losing, four, five or six pounds over a 10-year period."

You can't sleep yourself thin, and catching Z's will never take the place of a healthy diet or exercise. Try to focus on the quality of

your rest, not the number of hours you're getting each night (within reason, of course).

"It's going to come down to the quality of sleep," Jakicic says. "I think you're going to see a big difference between people who sleep six hours and have good quality versus [those] who sleep six hours and (have) poor quality.... It's really hard to have a lifestyle that allows you to lose weight (if you don't) have the energy to go out and do more."

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So eat well and rest up. Your body will thank you for it.

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