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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

SLEEP

Does Poor Sleep Make You Vulnerable to Binge-Eating?

Evidence shows that getting enough sleep may prevent urges to binge-eat.

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✓ Reviewed by Lybi Ma



KEY POINTS

- There is a connection among sleeping enough, hunger, and fullness cues, cravings, and your metabolism.
- Getting adequate sleep is one risk factor you can adjust to reduce your susceptibility to binge-eating.
- Changing your sleep habits can enhance your mental health and physical health, and it can improve your eating habits too.

This post was written by Gia Marson, Ed.D.

*"Perhaps you have noticed a desire to eat more when you're tired? This is no coincidence." —
Matthew Walker, Ph.D.*



Source: iStockphoto/FG Trade

A large number of adults and kids—more than 60 percent—don’t sleep enough. And lack of rest isn’t good for our physical or cognitive health. Research shows that inadequate sleep can cause a wide range of problems, including a decrease in immune system function, the inability to make effective decisions, a higher risk of car accidents, and difficulty learning.

Most of us are familiar with the mental health effects of lack of sleep, such as irritability, depressed mood, overwhelm, and anxiety. What many of us may not realize is that these same mental states often contribute to binge-eating behaviors and even to binge-eating disorder.

Is there a connection between sleep and binge-eating disorder?

Indeed, studies are showing a complex link between low-quality sleep and binge-eating disorder. For example, findings of a study of Swedish adults indicate an association between binge-eating and not getting enough sleep, poor quality of

Cravings may intensify. In addition, many individuals who struggle to overcome binge-eating and who report having sleep problems notice intense cravings for highly processed foods, especially in the evenings. They also find it nearly impossible to resist those urges when they're exhausted.

Stress eating is not a myth. Not getting enough sleep leads to an upsurge in levels of the stress hormone cortisol. This means we become more stressed, overwhelmed, and anxious. More cortisol may bring on heightened hunger and motivation. If you act in response, you may experience a greater susceptibility to binge-eating.

Short sleeping confuses hunger and fullness. Furthermore, getting only four hours of sleep for six days has been shown to have a harmful impact on glucose processing, carbohydrate metabolism, and endocrine function. And sleeping fewer than seven hours each night increases a hormone that makes you feel hungry and decreases a complimentary hormone that signals that you are full. It's possible, then, that you will eat even though you're not truly hungry and not get a cue to stop when you're satisfied.

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“It is plausible that insufficient sleep may mirror a calorically restricted hormonal state, whereby an individual is biologically driven to increase food intake, which may enhance susceptibility to BE.” — Trace et al. (2012)

Get better sleep, have better eating habits

Fortunately, sleep is a risk factor we can take control of. By getting more high-quality sleep, we can prevent and treat some aspects of metabolic disease and promote a healthy metabolism. Improving your sleep hygiene can be an effective addition to a multidisciplinary approach to healing from binge-eating disorder and to reducing binge-eating behaviors.

Making adjustments to sleep better may:

- Improve your ability to tune into physical hunger and recognize fullness cues
- Reduce the surges of cortisol that go along with sleep deprivation
- Help you experience fewer cravings that seem out of control

Lack of sleep is often the result of poor sleep hygiene. The first step to improving sleep quality is to establish a nighttime routine that encourages restful sleep:

- Aim to be in bed at the same time every night.
- Only use your bed for sleeping, to cue your mind that it's time to sleep when you lie down.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine a few hours before bedtime.
- Power off phones and computers an hour before shut-eye because the blue light interferes with the hormone that regulates the sleep-wake cycle.
- Try a soothing activity, such as a bath or meditation.
- Make sure your bedroom is cool, dark, and quiet.

THE BASICS

Why Is Sleep Important?

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But don't stop there. Also, create a morning routine that helps reinforce your circadian rhythm. Move your body (with light exercise, cooking breakfast, or emptying the dishwasher), waken your mind (perhaps with a morning meditation or journal writing), and get some sunlight (or bright light).

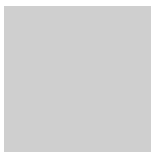
If you are not able to make improvements to your sleep habits on your own, find a therapist who offers CBT for insomnia. Or try apps that offer evidence-based guidance.

Prescribe one week of sleep extending

Once you have an improved sleep hygiene routine in place, aim to get at least eight hours of uninterrupted sleep for seven days in a row. Make daily observations by tracking how more sleep changes how you function, how you feel, and how you eat.

- Track your energy levels
- Notice your mood
- Identify what happens to cravings and urges to binge-eat

SLEEP ESSENTIAL READS



[Here's How to Deal with Shift Work Sleep Disorder](#)



[Do You Have a Shift Work Sleep Disorder?](#)

If you want to be less vulnerable to losing control with food, and you suspect you need more or better sleep, it's time to give sleep a chance. It may even be a relief to know that

habits and help you overcome binge eating. No matter what, sleeping more will likely improve your cortisol levels, glucose processing, and fat storage—all of which make it easier to eat intuitively, which is the ultimate goal.

References

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