

## **Can you really catch up on sleep over the weekend?**

It's a common cycle. You don't get enough sleep during the week. That leads to a weekend "catch-up," which leads to not getting enough sleep during the week, and so on and so on.

But can you really catch up on all that sleep debt on the weekend? Research examined the data, and the short answer of their findings: No.

The research was published in *Current Biology*. The researchers assigned young, healthy adults to one of three groups – one that was able to sleep nine hours a night for nine nights, one that was able to sleep only five hours each night for nine nights, and a third group that was allowed to sleep five hours for five days (weekdays) followed by a weekend of unlimited sleep followed by two more days with limited sleep (five hours).

They then looked at factors impacted by insufficient sleep like weight gain and insulin sensitivity.

The findings? For both sleep-restricted groups who slept five hours consistently or during weekdays, the researchers saw an increase in weight gain and late-night (after dinner) snacking. While the third group whose restrictions were lifted on the weekends did consume fewer calories during that time, their after-dinner consumption and weight gain rose when they returned to insufficient sleep during the week. Both sleep-restricted groups saw a decrease in insulin sensitivity.

"Changing your sleep habits on the weekends can actually be detrimental for your health as you're changing your sleep architecture and circadian rhythms," says Dr. Yelena Tumashova, a sleep medicine specialist at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Ill. "It's extremely important to follow the same sleep schedule during the week and on the weekends. Ideally all adults would sleep between seven and seven and a half hours a night, but for those that have a sleep debt and are looking to catch up on the weekend, a much more effective measure is keeping the same sleep schedule and adding a short nap, an hour at most, on the weekends."

So what about the study findings and the impact of poor sleep on one's health?

Dr. Tumashova is not surprised by the findings, as poor sleep affects your metabolic rate, which regulates during deep sleep. This can slow your metabolism, cause weight gain and even lead to Type 2 diabetes.

"Poor sleep also can cause daytime tiredness, leading to less exercise, less energy and when people are tired they tend to eat more unhealthy foods," she adds. "It also can cause REM deprivation which can lead to depression or other mood disorders."

But what if you can't get in those important hours of sleep during the week?

"We often find excuses for why we can't get sleep," says Dr. Tumashova. "I encourage all my patients to make their sleep a priority. Oftentimes when we sit down and talk through those excuses, we'll find that they aren't relevant. For example, if you have to wake up early for work, try going to bed earlier."

Having trouble getting to sleep early?

Start training your body. Create a positive sleep environment, without the TV or other screens and devices that distract us and keep us awake, Dr. Tumashova says.

"Make sure you're only sleeping in the bedroom. Reserving that space for sleep trains our bodies to go to bed when we're there," she says.

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Wishing you joy and good health,  
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