

The Link Between Fatigue and Weight Gain

By Debi Silber, MS, RD, WHC The Mojo Coach®

Is there any connection between eating to stay awake and the obesity epidemic? The answer is a resounding yes. Here's how.

When we're tired, we often turn to food to help us stay awake. The foods we choose are foods high in sugar because we're looking for the immediate energy surge sugar often provides. Those high sugar foods we reach for when we're tired are calorically dense yet nutrient void which means we're taking in a lot of calories with little nutritional value. When the body takes in more than it can use, the only option it has is to store it in the form of fat for use at a later date.

Here's what happens after a high sugar binge. The sugar rush is short lived due to a dramatic spike and drop in blood sugar and energy levels. The surge of insulin that was released during the high sugar binge then encourages the intake for more sugar. So this high sugar diet, which may have originally begun as a need for more energy, encourages an overuse of sugar and we go from binge to binge on a roller coaster ride of sugar induced energy and eventual weight gain.

When we eat to stay awake, we also secrete stress hormones such as cortisol. When over secreted, one of the things cortisol will do is stimulate our appetite for high sugar and high fat foods. So we find ourselves reaching for high sugar, high fat foods we may not have chosen if those hormones were never secreted due to a lack of sleep. It's a dangerous cycle, which begins with the need for sleep but ends with overeating and obesity.

Another problem that occurs when we're tired is that we don't have the mental clarity or focus required to pre-plan healthy meals or snacks. We grab what's easy which is often prepackaged "sub-food" loaded in sugar, fat and calories. When we're tired, we're also more likely to eat fast food and takeout food, which can be caloric time bombs as well.

Finally, when we're tired and we eat to stay awake instead of getting enough sleep, we prevent our bodies from getting back to a normal sleep cycle. Without getting back to a normal sleep cycle, hormonal levels continue to stay unbalanced, hormones continue to be secreted and a healthy sleep cycle and hormonal balance is kept at bay. This leaves us to continue to search for ways to increase our energy...even if it's causes excess weight or obesity.



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