

# Sleep-Deprived Teens Make Poor Food Choices

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Baltimore, Maryland — New research suggests that sleep-deprived adolescents make less healthy food choices than their well-rested peers, which may be a factor in the association between sleep and obesity, the research team says.

They found that adolescents who slept fewer than 7 hours each night were less apt to eat fruits and vegetables and more apt to eat fast food.

"This research on sleep and healthy food choices further supports the idea that getting teenagers to bed earlier (and/or letting them sleep later) will likely have lasting implications on their health and well-being," senior author Lauren Hale, PhD, associate professor of preventive medicine at New York's Stony Brook University, told *Medscape Medical News*.

Dr. Hale will present the study findings here June 4 at SLEEP 2013: Associated Professional Sleep Societies 27th Annual Meeting.

## Lasting Implications

"Previous literature shows strong associations between sleep and a range of health outcomes, including obesity," Allison Kruger, MPH, the study's lead author, also from Stony Brook University, told *Medscape Medical News*. "However, the mechanism by which sleep is associated with obesity is not well understood."

"One proposed mechanism is that food choices play a role, possibly due to changes in decision-making that may result from changes in sleep. We found that no US-based nationally representative studies had explored whether food choices vary by sleep duration during adolescence, and we sought to fill that gap," she explained.

The study team analyzed data from in-home interviews with 13,284 teenagers (mean age, 16 years) included in the 1996 wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. About 18% of them reported regularly sleeping fewer than 7 hours per night, with only 21% sleeping the recommended amount of at least 8 hours.

Compared with adolescents who reported regularly getting more than 8 hours of sleep each night, those who said they got fewer than 7 hours of sleep per night were less likely to eat fruits and

vegetables (odds ratio [OR], 0.75;  $P < .001$ ) and more likely to have eaten fast food 2 or more times in the past week (OR, 1.20;  $P < .05$ ).

"These results adjust for relevant covariates, including age, sex, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, perception of neighborhood safety, family structure, physical activity, and screen time," Kruger said.

### **Change Is Hard**

The findings are important, she noted, because teenagers have more control over their food and sleep, and the habits they form in adolescence can strongly affect their habits as adults.

"We already know that sleep is an underappreciated health behavior that tends to get overlooked with so many other competing demands for one's time," Dr. Hale added. "Teenagers especially are vulnerable to staying up late at night (watching television, playing video games, or even doing homework), and early high school start times also impede their opportunity for a getting a restorative night's sleep."

"Unfortunately," said Dr. Hale, "changing sleeping behaviors is not easy and more research is needed to investigate how sleep and sleep hygiene might be effectively incorporated into successful obesity prevention and health promotion programs."

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