



How Sleep Affects Diabetes Management

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Is Sleep the Missing Piece in Your Diabetes Management Plan?

It's common knowledge that getting enough high-quality sleep is important for your health, but did you know that lack of sleep can also make it more difficult to manage your diabetes? In fact, studies show that sleep disturbances and sleep disorders can lead to insulin resistance and glucose intolerance. Further, over time, sleep problems can increase the risk of developing diabetes and worsen pre-diabetes or diabetes symptoms in those who already have the conditions.

While diet and exercise often get the spotlight, sleep may be the unsung hero that can effectively balance blood sugar levels. Making positive changes to your sleep habits and sleep hygiene could help you improve both the management of your diabetes and your overall well-being.

How Poor Sleep Affects Blood Sugar

One study found that after controlling for factors such as age, body mass index, a sedentary lifestyle and family history, non-diabetic participants who slept for short durations were about [40% more likely](#) than those who got 7 to 8 hours of sleep to develop type 2 diabetes.

This is likely because lack of sleep can lead to [insulin resistance and disrupt blood sugar levels](#). [Research shows](#) that even one night of inadequate sleep can increase insulin resistance, resulting in higher blood sugar levels the next day. Over time, chronic sleep deprivation may contribute to poor diabetes control (or an increased

likelihood of developing diabetes in those who don't already have the condition) and a higher risk of diabetes complications.

The Link Between Sleep and Hormones

Chronic sleep deprivation affects the hormones that control your appetite. For example, some studies link inadequate sleep with [lower levels of the hormone leptin](#) and [increased levels of the hormone ghrelin](#). Leptin makes you feel full, while ghrelin makes you feel hungry. Low levels of leptin and high levels of ghrelin have been shown to increase the body's cravings for foods that are high in carbohydrates. In turn, these high-carb foods can further elevate blood sugar levels and, over time, lead to weight gain.



Staying up late and/or not getting enough sleep also causes your body to produce more of the stress hormone cortisol, which impacts the effectiveness of insulin and can cause blood sugar spikes.

Sleep Disorders and Diabetes

As diabetes and sleep are intricately linked, many people with diabetes experience poor sleep quality or insomnia. For instance, [high or low blood sugar during the night](#) can lead to sleep disruptions and next-day fatigue. When blood sugar levels are high, the kidneys overcompensate by causing you to urinate more often, resulting in frequent trips to the bathroom at night. High blood sugar may also cause headaches and increased thirst that can make it difficult to fall or stay asleep. Low blood sugar, on the other hand, can cause nightmares, nighttime sweating and waking up feeling irritated or confused.

People with diabetes are also more likely to experience sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome. In fact, around [55% to 86%](#) of people with type 2 diabetes and 46% to 52% of people with type 1 diabetes have sleep apnea. Sleep apnea causes your breathing to stop and start frequently throughout the night, leading to brief awakenings that interfere with sleep quality. The disorder has also been shown to [increase insulin resistance](#).

Addressing sleep disturbances through proper diagnosis and treatment can improve blood sugar management. Sleep apnea, for instance, can be treated with a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device that keeps the airways open to restore normal breathing and reduce sleep interruptions.

Sleep Tips for People with Diabetes

To keep your blood sugar balanced, it's important to get 7-9 hours of sleep per night. However, for people with diabetes, getting a good night's rest can be easier said than done.



Better Sleep for Better Health

If you're struggling with insomnia or another sleep disorder, consider discussing it with your healthcare provider. For people with diabetes, making sleep a priority could be the missing piece to better blood sugar control and enhancing your overall health.

Recommendations to improve your sleep quality and duration include:



Maintain a Consistent Schedule: Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day helps regulate your body's internal clock.



Exercise Regularly: Exercise has been shown to help you [fall asleep more quickly](#) and get better quality sleep (as long as you don't exercise too close to bedtime).



Create a Relaxing Bedtime Routine: Avoid screens and stimulating activities before bed to signal to your body that it's time to wind down.



Monitor Blood Sugar Before Bed: Keeping blood sugar levels stable overnight can prevent sleep disruptions from high or low blood sugar.



Manage Stress: Techniques like deep breathing, meditation or light stretching before bed can promote better sleep.



Limit Caffeine and Alcohol: Caffeine and alcohol can interfere with sleep quality, so try to avoid them, especially in the evening.

Sources: <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/professionals/diabetes-discoveries-practice/the-impact-of-poor-sleep-on-type-2-diabetes> | <https://www.webmd.com/diabetes/type-2-diabetes-sleep> | <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6036496/> | [https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692\(17\)30930-3/abstract](https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012-3692(17)30930-3/abstract) | <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/physical-health/lack-of-sleep-and-diabetes> | <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/sleep-diabetes-and-obesity> | <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/exercising-for-better-sleep>

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