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New Study: More Sleep Linked to Healthier Kids

(Phoenix, Arizona) January 24, 2011- A new study by the National Institute of Health suggests that children who get more sleep, even if it's only "catch-up" sleep on weekends, may be protected against obesity and other metabolic problems.

The study conducted among more than 300 children ages four to 10, found that those who slept the least and had the most irregular sleep schedules were over 4.4-fold more likely to be obese.

Short nights and variable sleep patterns were also linked to altered levels of insulin, LDL cholesterol, and the inflammatory marker high-sensitivity C-reactive protein among a subsample of the study group,

But compensating with extra sleep on the weekends lowered the kids' risk of obesity to less than 2.2-fold excess according to researchers.

"With childhood obesity at an all time high, this study is not something to be taken lightly. It's good to know, though that just by helping our children get the sleep they need, we can help them have a healthy weight," says Lauri Leadley, Sleep Expert and President of Valley Sleep Centers.

According to the Center for Disease Control,

"Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. Furthermore;

- Children and adolescents who are obese are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.
- Obese youth are more likely than youth of normal weight to become overweight or obese adults, and therefore more at risk for associated adult health problems, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis.

Talking Points:

- More sleep, even if only "catch-up" on weekends, could help protect school-age kids against obesity and other metabolic problems, an observational study suggested.



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- It was noted that short nights and variable sleep patterns were also associated with altered levels of insulin, LDL cholesterol, and the inflammatory marker high-sensitivity C-reactive protein among a subsample of the study group.
- Even just an extra half hour of sleep per night might lower body mass index (BMI) and reduce the metabolic effects that predispose to diabetes.
- The amount of sleep necessary depends on the age of your children, but research suggested a minimum of 9.5 hours of sleep were optimal for all ages.

Tips: How to Get your Child to Sleep

1. Establish a consistent bedtime routine. Most children tend to thrive on routine. One family we know has set up their routine to the minute. At exactly 7:00 PM, they take their baths, get into comfortable pajamas and brush their teeth. They turn off all of the lights in the house and light a special candle. Then they tell a family story. One person starts off; "Once upon a time, there was a lovely princess," then the next person takes over and so on, until the story is finished at 8:00. After the story they take turns blowing out the candle, and then get a drink and go off to bed where they are tucked in with their bedtime prayers. According to this family, this bedtime ritual has helped their children go to sleep soundly for many years.
2. Avoid stimulants just before bedtime. It's our belief that children should never have caffeine, but especially not before bedtime. Sugar is also a stimulant that should be avoided. If your child is on medication that tends to be a stimulant, talk to your doctor about taking the medicine at another time.
3. Have a healthy pre-bedtime snack. Certain foods contain an amino acid called tryptophan that causes sleepiness. Carbohydrates make tryptophan more available to the brain, which is why carbohydrate-heavy meals can make you drowsy. Proteins from the food we eat are the building blocks of tryptophan, which is why the best bedtime snack is one that contains both a carbohydrate and protein, such as cereal with milk, peanut butter on toast, or cheese and crackers.
4. Use a nightlight, but not too bright. Bright light can actually interrupt sleep. Use a light that has very low lighting, and place it in an area of the room that provides the lowest possible lighting. Even putting the light in the hallway or bathroom with the door open is an option.
5. Make sure their bedroom is safe and comfortable. A cool temperature, comfy sheets and pillows, and a dark room all contribute to a good night's sleep. And it does help to have their favorite stuffed animal or blanket. Also, close all drawers, closets and windows, and make sure toys and other objects are picked up off the ground and put away. For many children, an organized and ordered environment will go a long way to helping them feel safe, secure and comfortable.



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Sleep is an important component of good health for all of us, but for children who are still growing, it's especially true. By implementing some of the tips above, and helping their children get the sleep they need, parents can rest easy knowing that their kids are on the road to good health.

The study was funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Primary source: Pediatrics

About Valley Sleep Center:

Since 2002, Valley Sleep Center, accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, has provided Arizona with diagnostic sleep studies in a home-like atmosphere, ensuring a comfortable, relaxing experience for patients. Their Board Certified Sleep Medicine Specialists consist of experienced and knowledgeable physicians who provide expert advice across a multitude of sleep related disorders including insomnia, sleep apnea, snoring, excessive daytime sleepiness, hypertension, sleepwalking, and pediatric sleep problems. They accept most insurance plans as well as Medicare. For more information contact Lauri Leadley at 480-830-3900; <http://www.valleysleepcenter.com>.



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