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## Sleep and Childhood Obesity

BY [Staff Writer](#)

**It is important for your children to get enough sleep or else they are at a higher risk of becoming obese over time.**



Researchers believe that lack of sleep is one of the contributory factors in childhood obesity today. They also found that for preventing obesity a natural night's sleep is important and midday napping is not the answer.

Research was conducted out of the University of Washington and the University of California to find out the effects on children who do not get enough sleep during the night. Published in the journal of Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, the study comprised 1,930 US children between the ages of one month to 13 years. The children were divided into two groups – older (aged five to 13 years) and younger (aged one month to 59 months). According to the study, 36% of the older children and 33% of the younger children were obese or overweight as determined by body mass index or BMI, which is a commonly used ratio of person's weight and height.

Among the younger group, it was seen that children aged up to 5 years, have an 80% chance of becoming overweight. Children who were more than 5 years of age had less chance of becoming overweight in adulthood due to lack of sleep. Thus, sleep at nighttime is essential for every child. The children who do not get adequate sleep during the night may face two major problems. Firstly, tired kids will exercise less and will consume more food. Secondly, hormones that regulate tiredness and metabolism in our body are affected by lack of sleep. This becomes a vicious cycle that may create problems in the longer run.

For obese adults, lack of sleep affects the areas of the brain in a major way. It also impacts an individual's memory, attention span, retention capacity and ability to perform daily tasks. This in turn reduces the decision-making power of an individual. Studies have shown that sleeping for less than 6 hours at night increases the risk of heart disease, certain types of cancer and hypertension. In addition, lack of sleep decreases alertness, which makes it harder for the person to learn new tasks.

According to researchers, obesity is defined as having age-specific body mass index at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile as mentioned in national growth standards. It is seen that obesity has doubled among children between the age group of 2 to 5 years and adolescents aged between 12 to 19 years. The figure is tripled among the children between 6 to 11 years of age, during the last three decades. These statistics are giving an alarming warning as to how lack of sleep is resulting in obesity.