

Abstract

Is Sleep the Answer to Child Obesity †

Rachael Taylor

Department of Medicine, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand; Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre, University of Otago, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand; rachael.taylor@otago.ac.nz

† Presented at the 2018 Nutrition Society of New Zealand Annual Conference, Auckland, New Zealand, 28–30 November 2018.

Published: 5 March 2019

Although diet and physical activity have long been the cornerstone of obesity research, immense challenges in changing these behaviours long-term necessitate finding new approaches to combating obesity in children; sleep may provide one such approach. There is now an extensive body of prospective research, and a much smaller body of interventional research that supports a strong link between not getting enough sleep and a higher risk of obesity in children. These effects are apparent from infancy through to adolescence, are remarkably consistent, and appear stronger than those observed in adults. However, we currently don't know why being tired makes a child more likely to gain weight. Existing observational evidence suggests it is more likely to influence what children eat than how active they are, but experimental data proving causality are limited. This talk will outline (i) the observational evidence demonstrating the link between sleep and weight, (ii) evidence from new randomised controlled trials showing the effectiveness of sleep as a behavioural intervention in early life, (iii) what the likely mechanisms are, and (iv) the challenges involved in improving sleep in infants, children, and adolescents.



© 2019 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).