

# SLEEPINESS

## *fight or flight*



What does “fight or flight” have to do with sleepiness? Well, everything. The link is that when the sleeping brain is continually INTERRUPTED, it causes a “stress response” just like the fight or flight response in the body. When this happens (and it can happen up to six times a minute), the brain acts like it is under attack. This sets in motion a series of changes in metabolism including a rise in blood pressure, blood sugar, heart rate, breathing rate and the production of stress hormones such as cortisol.



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When these metabolic changes happen during wakefulness (like if someone suddenly attacked you) you would use the increase in blood pressure, blood sugar, and stress hormones to improve muscle performance so you could fight or run. Since during sleep there is no use for these performance-enhancing metabolic changes, your heart and blood vessels absorb the “punch” from the high blood pressure and your body’s insulin system kicks into gear to lower your blood sugar by moving these sugars into fat cells.

As this happens night after night, month after month, your insulin system is regularly active during sleep and your body becomes less capable of lowering the blood sugar. The result: type II diabetes develops. Or at best, if your insulin system continues to work well, you gain weight while you

sleep as the fat storage system absorbs the “sugar punch” it is continually fed.

Even if a person with a sleep disorder attempts to get enough sleep, since the brain is routinely disturbed from sleep (even if not necessarily awakened), there is a serious consequence – daytime sleepiness. This fragmented sleep also causes anxiety, depressed mood, memory problems, confusion, irritability, and even erectile dysfunction. The impact on one’s quality of life and happiness can be staggering. Sleep disorders often lead to social, marriage and work-related difficulties.

It is clearly established in sleep medicine that there is a direct relationship between high blood pressure, weight gain, diabetes, heart attacks, stroke and sleep disorders. The physical effects of sleep disorders which go untreated magnifies your risks for these life-altering conditions because lack of quality sleep results in ALL of these conditions, not just one of them. This is why good sleep is a matter of your personal safety and your long-term health and survival. So, what’s it going to be for you, fight or flight?

If you think you might have a sleep quality problem, talk to a sleep medicine physician about it. You wouldn’t trust your own truck to someone who just knows a little something about engines, so don’t place your fate in the hands of someone who knows a little something about sleep.

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