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Lack of sleep & stress- A vicious cycle

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Stress leads to chronic activation of the neuro endocrine system and contributes to many health related disorders including obesity. Dr. Shehla Shaikh, Consultant Endocrinologist, Saifee Hospital, Mumbai reveals more information in this regard.



I believe stress is ubiquitous and in this jungle of modern living we have forgotten to pause and wonder how it affects the very body that we all strive to maintain. The onset of diseases is much earlier and has become more difficult to treat.

You are often asked the question as to what is the cause for this early onset of disorders and you simply accord it to lifestyle and stress but stress is so difficult to define because it is so relative but any condition which changes the condition of homeostasis would be perceived as stress.

One of the manifestations of stress are altered living patterns which are taking a big toll on the endocrine health of the female population which is manifesting in varied disorders like obesity with PCOD starting in adolescence, hyperprolactinemia, primary and secondary infertility and premature menopause.

We need to understand that endocrine health is a finely tuned orchestra where a wrong note jars the entire system. Stress leads to chronic activation of the neuroendocrine system and contributes to one of the biggest banes of society today i.e obesity.

Weight gain can be due to many reasons but one of the contributory factors of modern living is sleep deprivation and eating disorders like night eating syndrome. Reduction in sleeping time to less than 7 hours results in a decrease in serum leptin an increase in serum ghrelin and increased hunger and appetite (in particular for calorie-dense foods with high carbohydrate content).

There is diminished activity in higher-order cortical evaluation regions combined with excess subcortical limbic responsivity. Furthermore it also affects glucose and insulin levels. Sleep deprivation consequently results in chronic fatigue with reduced cognitive function, reduced ability to make healthy food choices and reduced desire to exercise.

Hence sleep contributes in a very big way to your health and it does not mean only catching up on 40 winks a day but a proper restful sleep for at least 7 hours would go a long way in contributing to your overall metabolic health.