



The Connection Between Late-Night Eating and Belly Fat Brilliant Burnout

Many of our OnePeak Medical patients come to us feeling frustrated with their inability to lose belly fat. Most of the time, they have not made the connection between late night eating and fat storage.

When you eat or drink late at night, especially if you're having foods that cause your glucose to rise (with sugar, dairy, and starchy foods being the worst), you're going to set off a host of negative reactions in your body. And the higher the rise in glucose and insulin levels, the more profound the negative effects. Additionally, if you eat a meal and then continue to snack and drink throughout the evening, right up until bedtime, the insulin and glucose in your blood will continue to climb higher and higher each time. This not only makes your body continue to work to digest the food in the evening when you are actually needing fewer calories, it also puts you straight into a dreaded fat-storage zone.

This is common with people who love partying, eating dinner and desert later at night, or who continue to snack right until bedtime. All of these very common behaviors ramp up insulin production, creating more belly fat and causing you to get less restorative sleep (which, infuriatingly enough, also causes weight gain). While eating late can make you drowsy initially, it will also prolong digestion, which interrupts the process of restoration while sleeping causing you to wake up feeling worse the next day.

In addition, the excess calories and timing of food can accelerate the body's stress response. To help the body cope with stress, the strategy is to increase the amount of time between your last meal of one day and your first meal of the next. This is commonly referred to as "intermittent fasting", as you are creating periods of time where your glucose and insulin levels can go down to a "fasting" level each day. The reason intermittent fasting works so well is because there are two fuels your body can burn for energy: sugar and fat. And you have about six to eight hours of stored sugar as glycogen in your muscles and in your liver. Once you exhaust that, then you're out of fuel for the most part, unless your enzymes are adapted to burning fat.

Most people have plenty of fat to burn. The problem is when you keep your glycogen stores consistently replenished by eating every six to eight hours, then the enzymes that are adapted to burn fat for energy get impaired, preventing your body from burning the fat. So, you get into a vicious cycle, which I think is exacerbated by having breakfast, as this doesn't allow your body to enter that glorious fat-burning zone. You need that 12-hour window (or more) where you're not eating any food, to upregulate your enzymes to burn fat, downregulate the enzymes to burn carbs, and shift your body into fat-burning mode as your primary way of supplying energy. There are three major benefits to accomplishing this:

1. Your hunger for junk food and sugars disappears. It's the closest thing to magic I've ever seen with respect to diet.
2. You're able to normalize your body fat.
3. Your weight typically goes down, unless you're very muscular (as it doesn't decrease your muscle mass— which by the way is an extra benefit!)

If you need guidance for fat loss, optimizing metabolism and balancing your thyroid and male/female hormones, consider a medical visit at OnePeak Medical in Eugene OR. Heather Cook, FNP, specializes in medical weight loss, hormone balance, functional medicine and much more to get you back on track!

Dr. Nisha Jackson, PhD, is a nationally recognized hormone expert and gynecology health specialist. She is renowned as a lecturer, motivational speaker, radio host, columnist and author of her newest book, Brilliant Burnout. Nisha is the owner and founder of OnePeak Medical Clinics in Oregon, with locations in Eugene, Medford, Roseburg, Klamath Falls and Grants Pass. OnePeak Medical specializes in healthy aging and hormone balancing for men and women. Visit www.onepeakmedical.com for more information.

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