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The influence of sleep on obesity, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes risk - A review of the evidence

Dr.ssa M. Bitonti[1]

1 Nutritional Biologist, Italy

1. ABSTRACT

The publication analyzed is a narrative review examining epidemiological and experimental studies on the effects of sleep duration and quality on metabolism. The available abstract reports that sleep restriction increases hunger and food intake and, crucially, reduces insulin sensitivity, meaning it makes the action of the hormone that facilitates glucose entry into cells less efficient. A systematic search strategy, the number of studies included, or a quantitative meta-analysis are not reported in the available material.In paragraph 4.15 of "The Choice to Live in Health or Illness" by Dr. A. Colonnese and R. Panzironi, the research contributes to the passage stating that acute or chronic sleep disturbances can impair insulin action and increase metabolic risk. Independent evidence from randomized trials and meta-analyses supports the reduction of insulin sensitivity following insufficient sleep. Prospective associations with type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome are consistent, but do not prove that sleep is the sole cause of the clinical event.

ONLINE ARTICLE

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MISSION

LIFE Science Hub – Journal of Science was founded with the aim of making scientific knowledge accessible without giving up methodological rigour, quality of sources and authoritativeness of content. The journal promotes the dissemination of knowledge in the health, nutrition, medical and longevity sciences, building a bridge between the world of research and society.

Through articles, reviews, in-depth analyses and expert contributions, the Journal champions evidence-based medicine and science, fostering a correct interpretation of scientific data and countering misinformation. Every piece of content is developed with the aim of translating the complexity of research into understandable, useful and applicable information, while keeping intact the principles of accuracy, transparency and scientific independence.

Free from political, industrial and commercial influence, the journal stands as an authoritative and independent editorial space, dedicated to promoting scientific culture, professional development and the growth of health awareness among the public.

2. ANALYZED STUDY

The research question was whether insufficient sleep duration, sleep fragmentation, or other sleep disturbances might contribute to obesity, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes. The hypothesis described by the authors is that sleep has an active metabolic function: when it is too short or discontinuous, energy intake increases and the body's ability to utilize glucose decreases.The relevance to section 4.15 of "The Choice to Live in Health or Illness" by Dr. A. Colonnese and R. Panzironi mainly concerns a specific part of the narrative: insufficient or disturbed sleep lower insulin sensitivity higher probability of glucose regulation disorders. The publication does not, by itself, prove that every episode of insomnia causes diabetes or metabolic syndrome in a specific person. Instead, it describes a body of evidence suggesting that sleep loss can alter, even rapidly, metabolic mechanisms relevant to these conditions.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS OF THE ORIGINAL STUDY

The publication is a literature review rather than a single clinical trial. According to the available abstract, the authors discussed epidemiological evidence and laboratory interventions in which sleep was restricted, fragmented, or extended over several nights. The outcomes considered included hunger, appetite, food intake, activity in brain areas involved in food reward, insulin sensitivity, glucose tolerance, and potential hormonal changes.The available material does not report the number of studies examined, the databases consulted, the period of the bibliographic search, inclusion or exclusion criteria, risk of bias assessment, detailed participant characteristics, or statistical synthesis methods. For this reason, the publication should be interpreted as an informative narrative review, not as a meta-analysis that produces a single quantitative estimate of the effect.

4. RESULTS

The central finding reported in the abstract is that experimental sleep restriction consistently increases hunger, appetite, and food intake. The increase in caloric intake is described as exceeding the additional energy requirements due to the extra hours spent awake. This finding is relevant to the potential link between insufficient sleep and weight gain, but the abstract does not report absolute values, the duration of the interventions, or the average effect size.Regarding the most relevant passage in the book, the authors report that the adverse impact of experimental sleep restriction on insulin resistance is well-documented. In simple terms, after little sleep, cells may respond less effectively to insulin; consequently, to keep glucose within appropriate levels, the body may need to produce more insulin. The abstract links this reduced sensitivity to lower glucose tolerance and a higher future risk of type 2 diabetes.The review also reports limited evidence that sleep fragmentation, even without reducing total duration, can decrease insulin sensitivity. However, the authors emphasize that changes in leptin and ghrelin—hormones involved in satiety and hunger, respectively—were less consistent across studies. This observation reduces the certainty of a single hormonal explanation for the increase in appetite.

5. INTERPRETATION

The primary biological significance is that sleep helps maintain efficient glucose utilization. When rest is reduced or disrupted, the liver, muscles, and other tissues may respond less effectively to insulin. This state is known as insulin resistance: it is not equivalent to diabetes, but it represents a condition that can precede or promote glycemic imbalances, especially if it persists over time and coexists with other risk factors.The publication subject to the Evidence Review therefore supports the segment of altered sleep reduced insulin sensitivity. The subsequent extension toward obesity, metabolic syndrome, and type 2 diabetes requires different levels of evidence. Sleep experiments can indicate a short-term causal effect on metabolic markers; population studies, on the other hand, can show whether people with certain sleep habits experience clinical events more frequently over time, but they are also influenced by diet, physical activity, work shifts, obesity, stress, pre-existing diseases, and overall sleep quality.The publication does not allow for all the described alterations to be attributed to cortisol. The abstract considers multiple mechanistic pathways that act together. Cortisol and the sympathetic nervous system may contribute to the worsening of glucose

metabolism, but the relative role of each mechanism is not quantified in the available material.

6. INDEPENDENT CONFIRMING EVIDENCE

A meta-analysis of 41 randomized controlled trials has provided comprehensive experimental confirmation. In healthy adults, sleep restriction reduced insulin sensitivity with a standardized difference of –0.70, with $P < 0.01$. A negative value in this comparison indicates that the insulin response was worse during the sleep-restricted condition compared to the normal sleep condition. The same synthesis found increased hunger, higher energy intake, and a slight weight gain during partial restriction. The result confirms the section of the book regarding the deterioration of insulin action and makes the link with obesity and metabolic risk biologically consistent. The main limitations are the heterogeneity of the protocols, which are often short, and the prevalence of healthy participants [1].A subsequent randomized crossover study evaluated a model closer to daily life. Thirty-eight women without cardiometabolic diseases completed two six-week periods: adequate sleep and restriction of approximately 1.5 hours per night. During restriction, total sleep time was reduced by 1.34 hours per night. Compared to adequate sleep, fasting insulin increased by 6.8 ± 2.8 pmol/L and the HOMA-IR index, an estimate of insulin resistance based on fasting glycemia and insulin, increased by 0.30 ± 0.12; for both, $P = 0.016$. The effect was not explained by changes in adiposity. This study strengthens the causal interpretation of the insufficient sleep greater insulin resistance segment, but it concerns exclusively women with specific characteristics and does not measure the actual incidence of diabetes [2].For the more downstream clinical transition, a meta-analysis of ten prospective publications, including 482,502 participants and 18,443 new cases of type 2 diabetes, observed a U-shaped relationship between sleep duration and diabetes risk. The lowest risk was associated with categories of 7-8 hours per day. Among people who slept less than seven hours, each hour less was associated with a 9% higher relative risk of diabetes compared to seven hours; among those who slept longer, each hour more was associated with a 14% higher relative risk. This evidence confirms that sleep duration is prospectively associated with diabetes risk, but it does not prove that correcting sleep alone prevents the disease [3].Taken together, these studies reconstruct a coherent chain: controlled experimentation documents a reduction in insulin sensitivity after sleep restriction; prospective studies show that a sleep duration far from the habitual range is associated with more diabetes diagnoses over time. Longer studies remain necessary to establish whether sleep interventions effectively reduce the incidence of diabetes or metabolic syndrome.

7. CONFLICTING EVIDENCE

The evidence does not indicate an identical effect for every sleep disturbance, every population, or every metabolic measure. A systematic review with meta-analysis of randomized trials concluded that sleep restriction reduced overall insulin sensitivity as assessed by glucose tolerance tests or HOMA-IR. However, in the synthesis of a few studies that measured peripheral sensitivity with more specific methods, no statistically clear overall effect emerged. Furthermore, in the same review, sleep fragmentation and REM sleep disturbance did not show a uniform effect, whereas the suppression of slow-wave sleep and circadian misalignment appeared unfavorable [4].This heterogeneity does not contradict the connection between the original publication and the book's paragraph, but it requires precision. The effect is more robustly supported for sleep duration restriction compared to all possible forms of insomnia or fragmented sleep. Cortisol concentrations also do not appear to be consistently increased across all experimental protocols. No directly conflicting evidence sufficiently relevant to the fact that experimental sleep reduction can worsen certain markers of insulin sensitivity has been identified; this does not prove the absence of contrary results.

8. QUADRO COMPARATIVO E SINTESI DELLE EVIDENZE

The table distinguishes the publication subject to the Evidence Review from the independent research used to confirm or define the scope of the book's passage.

Quadro comparativo

Reference	Study type	Population or model	Main result	Direction of evidence	Strength of evidence
Original study	Narrative review	Epidemiological and experimental studies described in the abstract	Sleep restriction is reported to be associated with increased insulin resistance, reduced glucose tolerance, and higher metabolic risk.	biologically consistent evidence	moderate
[1]	Meta-analysis of RCTs	41 randomized studies in healthy adults	Sleep restriction reduced insulin sensitivity; standardized difference −0.70, P < 0.01.	direct confirmation	moderate
[2]	Crossover RCT	38 adult women without cardiometabolic diseases	Six weeks of reduced sleep increased fasting insulin and HOMA-IR compared to adequate sleep.	direct confirmation	moderate
[3]	Meta-analysis of prospective studies	482,502 participants, 18,443 incident cases of type 2 diabetes	Short and long sleep durations were associated with a higher future risk of diabetes compared to approximately seven hours.	indirect confirmation	moderate
[4]	Systematic review and meta-analysis of RCTs	Randomized studies on manipulations of sleep duration, quality, and timing	Overall unfavorable effects on insulin markers, but no uniform effect for fragmentation, REM, or some peripheral measures.	discordant evidence	moderate

9. SINTESI EDITORIALE E CONCLUSIONI

CONCLUSIONS

The publication analyzed is consistent with the book chapter because it summarizes the role of sleep in the regulation of insulin and glucose. Independent evidence quite strongly supports that experimentally reducing sleep can worsen markers of insulin sensitivity, even without significant changes in body weight. The association with type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome is moderately supported by prospective studies, but it does not equate to proof that altered sleep is the sole or inevitable cause of clinical outcomes.

Aggiornato al 25/11/2026. Questo contenuto riflette una sintesi divulgativa delle evidenze scientifiche al momento della pubblicazione e non sostituisce il parere medico.

10. TRANSPARENCY AND SCIENTIFIC RESPONSIBILITY

Artificial Intelligence was used solely as a tool for editorial and documentary support. All content, interpretations, bibliographic citations and conclusions have been verified, reviewed and approved by the author, who assumes full scientific responsibility for them.

The manuscript was also subjected to independent peer review prior to publication.

To ensure the greatest transparency, the complete history of the article, including the dates of submission, revision, acceptance and publication, as well as information on the peer review process, is available on the dedicated Article History page.

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