

Week 1 – July 1

## Get Your Zs to Help You Maintain a Healthy Weight

If you are like many North Carolinians, you made a New Year's Resolution to lose those extra pounds you've been carrying around. You changed how you eat, you are being more active, but some of those pounds are still lingering around.

Research has shown that people who get enough sleep are better able to lose weight than those who do not. There is also some evidence that getting too much sleep can hinder weight loss efforts as well.

Summer's long hours of daylight and warm weather do not help with getting sleep. There are lots of outdoor concerts, barbecues, festivals and baseball games that can keep you out late. If the kids are out of school, they may go to bed later, keeping you up, too. Despite these distractions, it is possible to get the sleep you need if you work at it.

Try these tips to get a good night's sleep:

1. Figure out how much sleep you need. Adults should aim for about seven to eight hours of sleep a night. However, the amount needed can vary between individuals. For some people, as few as five hours can be enough. Others may need as many as ten hours. A good way to figure out how much you need is to turn off your alarm clock and see when you wake up without it. Do this for several days and you should be able to count the hours of sleep you need a night.
2. Keep regular hours. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends. It is tempting to sleep in when you don't have to make the commute in to work, but it confuses your body and makes it more difficult for you to get up on Monday. Keeping your body on a schedule will help you get the sleep you need.
3. Exercise regularly. Exercising regularly can help you have more restful sleep and help you fall asleep faster. However, exercising too close to bedtime can keep you awake. Try to schedule your workouts at least three hours before you go to bed.
4. Don't eat a big meal before bed. A full stomach can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. Try to eat dinner several hours before turning in. If you are hungry later, have a light snack. An apple with two tablespoons of peanut butter or some whole wheat crackers with low-fat cheese are good choices.
5. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol in the evening. They can all disturb your sleep and keep you from getting a good night's rest.
6. Give yourself time to relax. Before hitting the sack, read a book or a magazine or do something else quietly to relax your body and mind. If things are troubling you, write them down to think about in the morning and put them away. Tomorrow is another day, and with a good night's sleep, you will better be able to take on whatever it brings.