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The Missing Piece of the Healthy Lifestyle Puzzle: SLEEP

Physicians often advise patients to eat better and exercise more, but in spite of these healthy lifestyle changes, some patients still feel burned out, can't drop those extra pounds, and don't have the energy to greet each day with enthusiasm. What is missing? It could be sleep.

Sleep rejuvenates the body and mind, regulates mood, and is related to learning and memory functions. Adequate sleep is a critical factor in health, weight and energy level, and an important part in any healthy lifestyle plan. If you are still struggling after monitoring your diet, exercise and sleep patterns, you may want to talk to your doctor, or consult with a sleep specialist.

Sleep apnea is a common sleep disorder seen in people who are overweight. People who suffer from sleep apnea experience lower energy levels due to daytime sleepiness, and often find it difficult to commit to an exercise and/or diet program--which would improve both their weight and sleep apnea. When these patients are treated for sleep apnea they feel restored and are more willing to start an exercise and a diet program.

Proper timing of exercise is important too because exercise right before bedtime can lead to a poor night's sleep. I recommend exercising at least three hours before bedtime, and the best time is usually late afternoon. Exercising at this time is beneficial because body temperature is related to sleep. Body temperatures rise during exercise and take as long as 6 hours to begin to drop. Because cooler body temperatures are associated with sleep onset, it's important to allow the body time to cool off before sleep.

Please know that sleep is not a luxury. Getting the proper amount of sleep each night is necessary to face the world with your best foot forward. Sleep will help you on the road to good fitness, good eating and good health.

Dr. Dacelin St. Martin is board-certified in sleep, internal, and pediatric medicine. He is the medical director of the "Sleep Clinic of America" in Lecanto, which is accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. If you have any questions, contact him at Sleep Clinic of America, 1980 N. Prospect Ave., Lecanto, FL 34461, call 352-52SNORE (527-6673), or visit www.SleepClinicAmerica.com.