Will better sleep help you avoid creeping weight gain? Probably.

Imagine, it’s 3 pm and you are in your office and feeling sleepy. Instinctively, you reach for a cup of coffee and maybe something sweet to go with it, to give you a boost. Later, on the way home, you feel too tired to stop at the gym and decide that picking up “takeout” for dinner will give you a much needed break. At 11 pm you finally hit the sack, but are frustrated that you cannot fall asleep. After an hour of tossing and turning, you get up and munch on something while watching reruns of The Office.

This scenario is all too familiar for many of us and the ensuing vicious cycle of poor sleep/poor eating leads to stress, unwanted pounds and unintended health consequences. Don’t give up, here are 5 reasons to keep your focus on improving your sleep to help maintain healthy weight:

1. Lack of sleep affects metabolism. “It’s not so much that if you sleep, you will lose weight, but if you are sleep-deprived, your metabolism will not function properly,” explains Michael Breus, PhD, author of Beauty Sleep and the clinical director of the sleep division for Arrowhead Health in Glendale, AZ. Lack of sleep and our ability to lose weight has a lot to do with two hormones, ghrelin and leptin. “Ghrelin is the ‘go’ hormone that tells you when to eat, and when you are sleep-deprived, you have more ghrelin,” Breus says. “Leptin is the hormone that tells you to stop eating, and when you are sleep deprived, you have less leptin.” More ghrelin plus less leptin equals weight gain.

Read on for 4 more reasons to sleep well...
2. **It Stops Late-Night Snacking.** The longer you are awake, the more likely you are to consume calories you don’t need, which can cause you to gain weight, according to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania. Over the course of seven days, they found that sleep-restricted subjects gained more weight than their well-rested counterparts, mostly because they ate 550 calories from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m., a time when the other group was asleep.

3. **It reduces the urge for high calorie comfort food.** “When you have sleep deprivation and low energy, most automatically go for a bag of potato chips or other comfort foods,” says Susan Zafarlotfi, PhD, clinical director of the Institute for Sleep and Wake Disorders at Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. The immediate result? You may be able to fight off sleepiness. The ultimate result? Unwanted pounds from poor food choices.

4. **It Helps You Shop Leaner.** Never go grocery shopping when you’re hungry – or exhausted. In a study published in the journal *Obesity*, sleep-deprived men bought nearly 1,300 calories more in food than well-rested men. This was independent of hunger as all participants had eaten a standardized breakfast before the test.

5. **It Encourages Portion Control.** In a Swedish study, well-rested and sleep-deprived participants were asked to complete a computerized “ideal portion size” task where they manipulated their serving size on a screen. The findings: Sleep-deprived people added 35 more calories in snacks on their digital “plate” compared to well-rested participants.

*Source: Women’s Health, WebMD Archives*