

Real Voices: Marie-Pierre St-Onge

Meet Marie-Pierre, an assistant professor at Columbia University in the US

What do you do?

I do research on sleep and nutrition and how it relates to obesity and cardiometabolic health.

What questions are you looking at?

I look at whether restricting sleep or shifting the times we sleep can be a risk factor for the development of obesity.

How might sleeping less make us eat more?

There are different mechanisms. For example, if you're restricting your sleep then you are awake for more hours, so there's more opportunity to eat. Being awake longer can also impact the hormones that regulate your appetite and hunger, influencing how much and what you eat.

Can you sleep too much?

There is also a relationship with obesity and long sleep duration, nine hours and longer. But it's complicated to study.

Who are the people that tend to sleep for long periods?

Often they're more depressed or on medications that might make you sleep more or cause you to put on weight.

What do we definitely know about energy intake and body mass?

Everybody who eats more than they burn will gain weight. But, with the same degree of overeating, some people will put on more or less weight than others. This could be due to differences in modes of energy expenditure. For example, some people might become a little more fidgety when they overeat, so they will use more energy than others.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

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Do metabolic rates vary between people?

Certainly, but you can also modify it by exercise and body composition, to a certain degree.

How did you get into research?

I had no idea about research when I was a teenager. I loved biology, chemistry, physics, and maths and knew I wanted to do something with science or medicine. Things became clearer when I got to university, but research didn't come into mind until I worked with a Master's student on her research project. I thought it was just the coolest thing that we would find out something that nobody else knew yet!

What's your treat of choice?

An oatmeal raisin cookie – a really good one. Not too soft, not too crunchy.

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