

What to Eat for Better Sleep

We've all been there. Tossing and turning in bed, regretting the late spicy meal we had just hours before. As you'll already be acutely aware — your food choices can mess with your sleep in some very direct ways.

WHAT NOT TO EAT BEFORE SLEEP

1) Spicy foods

This is the most commonly-known food type that induces a poor night's sleep. That's because spicy foods can impact digestion even after you've fallen asleep. Spicy food also contains high levels of capsaicin, a phytochemical that increases metabolism and thermogenesis, a process that produces heat. So, if you are a big fan of spicy foods, you might be better off saving them for lunch or an early dinner.

2) Alcohol

There's a common misconception that alcohol helps with sleep, but this couldn't be further from the truth. While alcohol has sedative effects that can induce feelings of relaxation and sleepiness, the consumption of alcohol — especially in excess — impact sleep cycles. Since alcohol is a sedative, sleep onset is often shorter for drinkers and some fall into deep sleep rather quickly. As the night progresses, this can create an imbalance between the stages of our natural sleep cycle. This decreases overall sleep quality, which can result in shorter sleep duration and more sleep disruptions.

3) Fried and fatty foods

Aside from increasing your risk of heart disease, obesity and cancer, filling up on greasy, fried foods also makes it harder to sleep at night. Along with slower digestion, consuming high-fat foods can alter levels of orexin, a neurotransmitter involved in wakefulness and sleep.

4) High-sugar foods

It's no secret that indulging in sweets and sugary treats can negatively impact your health, but they also impact your ability to get a good night's sleep. Foods that are high in sugar like candy, cookies and soda, cause spikes and crashes in blood sugar levels — and energy. They can also reduce the release of melatonin, a hormone that plays a central role in regulating your circadian rhythm (body's internal clock).

5) Caffeinated beverages

Not only can caffeine make it harder to fall asleep initially, it can also impact the body's total sleep time. Some studies have even found that consuming caffeine six hours before bedtime reduces total sleep time by up to one hour! This is why the old tale of 'no caffeine after 3pm' holds some truth.

As a general rule of thumb, you should also avoid having big meals shortly before bed. Trying to fall asleep with a full belly is far from comfortable, and continuing with digestion through the night requires energy. Eating larger lunches and lighter dinners tends to help promote sleep.

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So, now that we know what and when not to consume before we try to reach the land of nod, what foods should we be looking to eat in the evening?

To understand this, we first need to delve into the role of melatonin...

Melatonin is the chemical responsible for sleep. It is produced by the pineal gland and functions as both a hormone and a neurotransmitter. Melatonin production is regulated by light, so it increases in the evening and decreases in the morning signalling to the body that it is time to either go to bed or to wake up. Some people choose to take a melatonin supplement to help combat their insomnia, but it is also possible to get melatonin directly from food.

So, what food or drink contain melatonin, or increase the production of melatonin? Or, which ones promote sleep on their own?

1) Almonds

While almonds have been associated with lower risks of chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease,



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they have also been linked with good sleep. This is because almonds, along with several other types of nuts, are a source of melatonin. Almonds are also an excellent source of magnesium. Consuming adequate amounts of magnesium may help improve sleep quality, especially for those who have insomnia.

2) Turkey

It's certainly not a go-to source of protein for meat eaters, but turkey can help with sleep! Most notably, it contains the amino acid tryptophan, which increases the production of melatonin. The protein in turkey may also contribute to its ability to promote tiredness. There's evidence that consuming moderate amounts of protein before bed is associated with better sleep quality, including less waking up throughout the night.

3) Chamomile tea

Chamomile tea and other teas are renowned for their antioxidants. One of these antioxidants is apigenin, which binds to certain receptors in your brain that promote sleepiness and reduce insomnia. Various studies have backed this theory up, with one revealing that those who consume 270 mg of chamomile extract twice daily for 28 days fell asleep 15 minutes faster and experienced less nighttime waking compared to those who didn't consume the extract.

4) Kiwifruit

According to multiple studies, Kiwifruit may be one the best things to eat before bed. While more scientific evidence is required to understand why studies have revealed this trait, experts have put it down to the fruit's impact on serotonin, a chemical that helps regulate your sleep cycle. It has also been suggested that the anti-inflammatory antioxidants in kiwis, such as vitamin C and carotenoids, may be partly responsible for their sleep-promoting effects.

5) Tart cherry juice

Another relatively unknown thing to consume for a good night's sleep is tart cherry juice. In one small study, adults with insomnia drank eight ounces (240 ml) of tart cherry juice twice a day for two weeks. They slept 84 minutes longer and reported better sleep quality compared to when they didn't drink the juice. Similarly to almonds, the reason behind these results were put down to the juice's high levels of melatonin.

6) Malted and nighttime milk

Malted milk is made by combining milk and a specially formulated powder that contains primarily wheat flour, malted wheat, and malted barley along with sugar and an assortment of vitamins. It's these vitamins that is thought to improve sleep quality. A popular brand of malted milk is Horlick's. Meanwhile, normal milk itself also contains melatonin, and some milk products are melatonin enriched.

To reap the benefits of these melatonin-packed sleepenhancing foods and drinks, nutritionists believe is best to consume them 2—3 hours before bed. Just like a spicy curry, eating immediately before going to sleep may cause digestive issues that can keep you tossing and turning late into the night!



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