

Foods That Help or Harm Your Sleep

What You Eat Affects How You Sleep

If you could pick the right foods to help you get the best sleep possible, wouldn't you? And if you knew which foods would hinder your restful slumber, wouldn't you avoid them? Now's your chance to learn which foods to eat, and which to steer clear of for a good night's sleep.

Reach for Tryptophan-Rich Foods

We've all heard of warm milk's magical ability to send us off to dreamland. Do you know why it's true? Dairy foods contain tryptophan, which is a sleep-promoting substance. Other foods that are high in tryptophan include nuts and seeds, bananas, honey, and eggs.

Indulge Your Craving for Carbs

Carbohydrate-rich foods complement dairy foods by increasing the level of sleep-inducing tryptophan in the blood. So a few perfect late night snacks to get you snoozing might include a bowl of cereal and milk, yogurt and crackers, or bread and cheese.

Have a Snack Before Bedtime

If you struggle with insomnia, a little food in your stomach may help you sleep. But don't use this as an open invitation to pig out. Keep the snack small. A heavy meal will tax your digestive system, making you uncomfortable and unable to get soothing ZZZs.

Put Down the Burger and Fries!

As if you needed another reason to avoid high-fat foods, research shows that people who often eat high-fat foods not only gain weight, they also experience a disruption of their sleep cycles. A heavy meal activates digestion, which can lead to nighttime trips to the bathroom.

Beware of Hidden Caffeine

It's no surprise that an evening cup of coffee might disrupt your sleep. Even moderate caffeine can cause sleep disturbances. But don't forget about less obvious caffeine sources, like chocolate, cola, tea, and decaffeinated coffee. For better sleep, cut all caffeine from your diet four to six hours before bedtime.

Medications May Contain Caffeine

Some over-the-counter and prescription drugs contain caffeine, too, such as pain relievers, weight loss pills, diuretics, and cold medicines. These and other medications may have as much or even more caffeine than a cup of coffee. Check the label of nonprescription drugs or the prescription drug information sheet to see if your medicine interferes with sleep or can cause insomnia.

Skip the Nightcap

Here's the catch-22 with alcohol: It may help you fall asleep faster, but you may experience frequent awakenings, less restful sleep, headaches, night sweats and nightmares. If you're consuming alcohol in the evening, balance each

drink with a glass a water to dilute the alcohol's effects. For a good night's sleep, the better bet is to avoid alcohol four to six hours before bedtime.

Beware of Heavy, Spicy Foods

Lying down with a full belly can make you uncomfortable, since the digestive system slows down when you sleep. It can also lead to heartburn, as can spicy cuisine. Make sure to finish a heavy meal at least four hours before bedtime.

Keep Protein to a Minimum at Bedtime

Sorry Atkins. Protein, an essential part of our daytime fare, can be a poor choice for a bedtime snack. Protein-rich, high-fat foods are harder to digest. So skip the fatty high-protein snack before bedtime and opt for a glass of warm milk or some sleep-friendly carbs, like crackers.

Cut the Fluids by 8 P.M.

Yes, staying hydrated throughout the day is great for your body, but curtail your fluid intake before bed. You're sure to have interrupted sleep if you're constantly getting up to go to the bathroom.

Don't Be Fooled by a Relaxing Smoke

Nicotine is a stimulant, with effects similar to caffeine. Avoid smoking all together and especially before bedtime or if you wake up in the middle of the night.

REFERENCES:

National Sleep Foundation: "Food and Sleep."

Sleep.com: "Eating Before Bed – The Good and the Bad."

HowStuffWorks.com: "How Caffeine Works."

Nemours. KidsHealth.org: "What Is Caffeine."

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point web site: "Caffeine Containing Products."

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point web site: "Caffeine Containing Products."

University of Maryland Medical Center, Sleep Disorders Center: "Sleep Hygiene: Helpful Hints to Help You Sleep."

HelpGuide.org: "How to Sleep Better."

http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/ss/slideshow-sleep-foods?ecd=wnl_slw_072414&ctr=wnl-slw-072414_nsl-promo_2&mb=fX8rxdS%40tzxsSWriAjTYouHnVevIimbC5BtYhTU5%2fzg%3d