

Helpful and Harmful Sleep Foods

Learn which foods to eat, and which to steer clear of for a good night's 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?

Have a Snack before Bed

- If you struggle with insomnia, a little food in your stomach may help you sleep. Keep the snack small.
- 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. Make sure to finish a heavy meal at least 4 hours before bedtime.



Eat Tryptophan-Rich Foods

- Many have heard that warm milk before bed can help us fall asleep. Why is this true? Dairy foods contain tryptophan, which is a sleep-promoting substance. Other foods that are high in tryptophan include nuts and seeds, bananas, and honey.

Cave 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.

Forget the Unhealthy Fats

- 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, decaffeinated coffee, and even some medications (pain relievers, weight loss pills, diuretics, and cold medicines).
- Make sure to check the labels to see if any of your medications can cause sleep disturbances or insomnia. For better sleep, cut all caffeine from your diet 4-6 hours before bedtime.



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Skip the Alcohol

- 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 of water to dilute the alcohol's effects. For a good night's sleep, the better bet is to avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.

Keep Protein at a Minimum

- Although protein is an essential part of our daytime fare, it 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

- Yes, staying hydrated throughout the day is great for your body, but avoid fluid intake 2 hours 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 altogether and especially before bedtime. If you must have a cigarette before bed, make sure to have it 3 or more hours before hitting the sheets.

