

Food for Thought

8 Foods That Can Help (or Hinder) Your Ability to Get a Good Night's Sleep



A good night's sleep is one of the best gifts you can give yourself. In the short term, it can make or break your day, impacting both your mood and ability to focus. In the long term, good sleep habits are linked to brain function, weight, heart health, immune health, and even life expectancy. So getting your ZZZZs is one of the most important things you can do for your mental and physical health... but doing

so isn't always easy. In fact, approximately 30% of adults report having insomnia, which is defined as having trouble falling or staying asleep.

While there are many things you can do to help improve your sleep habits, one surprising contributor isn't commonly known. The foods you eat throughout the day, and especially in the hours leading up to bedtime, can have an impact on your ability to sleep or the quality of the sleep you get.

How does what we eat impact our ability to sleep? While it's no exact science, we do know that certain amino acids and nutrients can help you sleep, while other types of foods include ingredients that can cause symptoms that hinder or interrupt your ability to sleep. By the time you're done reading, you'll know the top 4 foods to help enhance your ability to sleep – as well as the top 4 to avoid. Read on, fellow sleep lovers!

Sleep Helpers

Everyone loves a good helper, right? When it comes to sleep, there are several key nutrients that can help you get the rest you need. When trying to optimize your diet for bedtime, consider incorporating foods rich in the following vitamins, minerals, and/or nutrients.

- Melatonin
- Calcium
- Potassium
- Magnesium
- Tryptophan
- B6
- Selenium

Sleep Antagonists

While every good story has an antagonist, your best bet for a good night's rest is to avoid these enemies – all of which are known to negatively impact either the quality of sleep you get or your ability to sleep at all.

- Caffeine
- Sugar
- High-Fat Foods
- Spicy Foods

4 Worst Foods to Eat Before Bed

Let's face it, we all want a good night's sleep, but sometimes when a late-night snack attack hits, we're not thinking clearly. We're here to remind you to think before you eat when bedtime is near – and avoid these foods that are likely to keep you tossing and turning.



Hold the Vino

It can be so tempting to end the day with a nice glass of wine or a nightcap. While we know it can feel rewarding in the short term, any alcoholic drink is the wrong choice before bed. Alcohol has fooled people for decades, luring you into thinking it's a sleep aid because it can help you to fall asleep quickly. Unfortunately, according to the Cleveland Clinic, when the sedative effects of alcohol wear off while you're sleeping, that's when sleep disruption occurs. In addition, imbibing before bed can cause an increased heart rate and nightmares or vivid dreams – both of which can disturb your sleep. It also relaxes your airways, which can lead to respiratory problems like snoring or sleep apnea.



Ditch the Chocolate

Chocolate is one of the most popular late-night treats we

love to eat. The bad news is that chocolate – especially varieties that are lower in sugar and higher in cacao – contain high amounts of caffeine. And we all know caffeine before bed is a no-no. Caffeine is a stimulant that has been proven time and again to contribute to insomnia, anxiety, excessive urination, rapid heartbeat, and (obviously) sleep disturbance.



Don't Scream for Ice Cream

When it comes to sleep, sugar is an enemy to us all. Eating sweets is another way many of us like to reward ourselves after a long day, but it's best to avoid foods high in sugar if you want to sleep well. High-sugar and/or high-glycemic foods cause blood sugar levels to spike while you sleep, which can lead to real disruptions.



Put Down the Pizza

There are so many reasons to avoid this acidic, high-fat

indulgence, but the most obvious is that it's likely to cause heartburn or indigestion – both of which can be aggravated by lying down. Plus, your body will try to work hard to digest this late-night meal, which can also disturb your sleep. Finally, while it hasn't been proven, many people have reported nightmares after eating pizza before bed.

➔➔ 4 Best Foods to Eat Before Bed

If you have trouble sleeping – or just want to get a better night's rest – consider incorporating these top foods into your diet every day. Your body and mind are sure to thank you in the morning.



Put a Cherry on Top

Cherries (or cherry juice) are a great late-night choice, primarily because of their melatonin content. According to a research study published in the *European Journal of Nutrition*, those who drank only one ounce of tart cherry juice per day reported better sleep habits than those who didn't – including sleeping more and sleeping more soundly.

So, whether you choose a bowl of cherries or a shot of cherry juice, you'll sleep more soundly when it's time to hit the hay. Just be sure to forgo the ice cream, which is on the no-no list for bedtime snacks.



Go Bananas!

If you want to sleep like a baby, try eating like a monkey. Bananas are chock-full of potassium and magnesium, both of which are sleep-inducing. Eating bananas can help your muscles relax and, due to their high magnesium content, can also help improve symptoms of insomnia. According to a 2012 study published in the *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, magnesium was shown to improve sleep efficiency and duration of sleep, and even help you feel ready to wake up in the morning. Now, that sounds appealing, so get peeling!

Kiwi is the Key

Yup, you read that right – kiwi! It may sound odd to eat kiwi before bed, but there is actual research (numerous studies, in fact) to prove it's an incredible food to eat before you head to bed. In a research study conducted at the Taipei Medical

Sleep, According to the Experts

Over the years, sleep has been the subject of much research, helping us understand how much sleep we need and the many benefits our bodies get from good sleep habits.



The American Sleep Association says adults should get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night.



According to a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, well-rested participants ate an average of 300 fewer calories than those who lacked sufficient sleep.



Research published in *SLEEP Journal* indicated that those who slept 7 to 9 hours per night had fewer depressive symptoms.



One study demonstrated that people who slept 8 hours or more per night were three times less likely to catch a cold than their sleep-deprived counterparts. That's because your body works hard while you're sleeping, making more white blood cells to keep sickness and infection at bay.



University in Taiwan, study participants (who all had sleep problems) ate two kiwi fruits an hour before bed for four weeks, and the results were favorable for sleep indicators across the board. Not only did those who ate the kiwi fall asleep more quickly, they slept more efficiently and more soundly. Finally, they simply slept more – with total sleep time increasing among volunteers by 13.4%. Researchers say the fruit’s high serotonin levels and high antioxidant qualities are what’s driving these dramatic results.

Get Nutty

Crunchy snacks like nuts are great for a late-night snack fix, and our top recommendation for sleep is almonds. That’s because almonds are high in calcium and also magnesium – both of which promote good sleep by relaxing muscles and calming your body. They’re also a high-protein, calorie-dense food, which means they will keep your blood sugar levels stable throughout the night, unlike carbohydrates which can

cause spikes in blood sugar that could cause you to wake before you’re ready.

Maybe this article put you to sleep – or maybe it’s keeping you up too late. Either way, tomorrow is a new day. Take this information to heart and think carefully about your late-night diet choices. While it can be easy to give in to temptation, choosing the right foods before bed (or avoiding the wrong ones) can have a significant impact on your sleep habits. And since sleep is critical for both your body and your mind – and can have lasting effects on your overall health – do



yourself a favor by getting the quantity and quality you need. Sleep tight, my friends.

Sources

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[Why You Should Limit Alcohol Before Bed for Better Sleep](#) (Cleveland Clinic)