



7 Nutrition Strategies for a Good Night's Sleep

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I'm a productivity junkie! Living in a culture where productivity is highly valued, cutting corners on sleep is often a life survival skill. We've been trained to function this way (at least in the US) for over 50 years. As a result, being tired and fatigued is the status quo for many. But, new research is proving this philosophy to be short sighted for our long term health.

Sleep researchers are now telling us that lack of sleep can be linked to obesity, heart disease, diabetes and increased sickness from all causes. And, it can even shorten our lifespans!

There are many factors that contribute to inadequate sleep – poor sleep hygiene, stress, pain, sleep apnea, sloppy diet, a snoring sleep partner, excess screen time in the evenings, etc. Obviously, some of these are easier to change than others. So, let's focus on something that's easier to change.

Nutrition plays a key role in whether you sleep well or sleep at all. Some foods and nutrients enhance sleep while other foods, nutrients and habits act as stimulants to impair sleep. Many people recognize that certain foods and beverages have a major impact on their sleep quality and habits. In case you haven't noticed the connection, there is good scientific research to back this up.

So, are your food choices leading to a night of restful slumber or one of tossing and turning?

Check out these 7 simple nutrition strategies that can lead to improved sleep and begin implementing them today.

1. Cut off caffeine from all sources by 12:00 noon.

Caffeine is a stimulant. It increases heart rate, body temperature and can also increase blood pressure – things that are counterproductive for trying to wind down for sleep.

To improve your ability to fall asleep at night, cut off caffeine from **ALL SOURCES** after 12:00 noon and consider **limiting caffeine to 200 mg per day** (the amount in 10 ounces of coffee).

Check out **THIS CHART** to take an inventory of your daily caffeine intake.

2. Maintain a healthy glucose level throughout the day by eating protein, healthy fat and unprocessed carbs at each meal and snack.

When your blood glucose spikes and crashes from eating processed meals and snacks, your energy level waxes and wanes throughout the day.

Maintaining a healthy glucose level by “anchoring” feedings with protein and healthy fats equates to high energy and productivity all day so that when the day is done, your natural sleepiness occurs at night where it belongs.

So, include protein, healthy fat and unprocessed carbs at each of your meals and snacks.

- Plan your breakfast and snack plates like [THIS](#).
- Plan your lunch and dinner plate like [THIS](#).

3. Avoid blood glucose mayhem by eliminating Added Sugar and processed carbohydrates, especially at bedtime.

Eating Added Sugar and processed carbs before bedtime can impair your ability to fall asleep by causing a quick glucose spike and energy surge (think WIRED!). If you must have a small bedtime snack, choose a lean protein or healthy fat and a small serving of whole, unprocessed carbs such as 10 almonds with a small piece of fruit. Otherwise, skip the snack and go straight to bed!

If you’ve already made some progress trading out sugary foods for fresh, whole foods, take it one step further and reduce Added Sugar to the World Health Organization’s recommendations of less than 25 grams per day. Read [this blog](#) for information on Added Sugars.

4. Eat 3 – 4 magnesium-rich foods every day. Magnesium is the “relaxation” mineral.

Magnesium is involved in over 300 essential metabolic reactions in the body, one of which is calming and relaxing the body. Functional Medicine practitioner, Mark Hyman, MD, states magnesium is “the most powerful relaxation mineral available.” It is useful for muscle relaxation, stress reduction and as a mild, natural sleep aid.

Many of us don’t consume enough magnesium and some medications can either impair your body’s absorption of magnesium or cause excess magnesium loss.

To reap the natural soothing benefits of magnesium, **INCLUDE THESE** foods in your diet every day, especially in the evenings, to enhance your nighttime sleepiness.

For a quick way to remember high magnesium foods, use this acronym:

B-G-G-N
(Beans, Greens, Grains & Nuts)

You can also consider taking a magnesium glycinate supplement in the evenings.

Taking 200-400 mg of magnesium glycinate in the evenings can promote calmness and sleepiness.

- **NOTE:** People with kidney disease or severe heart disease should take magnesium supplements only under a health care provider's supervision.

Talk to your nutritionist or health care provider to see if a magnesium glycinate supplement is right for you.

And, soak in an Epsom Salt bath.

Epsom salt is an excellent source of magnesium. To get some much needed, mood-soothing magnesium, soak in an Epsom salt bath in the early evenings several nights a week. As an added bonus, it can help ease muscle tension and pain. [CLICK HERE](#) for a recipe for Epsom Salt Bath.

5. Include ½ – 1 cup of whole, unprocessed carbohydrates with your protein-containing dinner to encourage restful sleep.

Have you ever heard the common myth that gorging on Thanksgiving turkey leads to a Thanksgiving nap? Well, here's an interesting myth-buster: it's the carbohydrates in your Thanksgiving meal, not the turkey, that create the need for Thanksgiving ZZZs. [READ MORE](#) about how carbohydrates help tryptophan cross the blood brain barrier to help induce quality sleep.

Including ½ cup to 1 cup of whole, unprocessed carbohydrates ([LIKE THESE](#)) with your protein-containing dinner promotes relaxation and drowsiness preparing you for a night of restful sleep.

For more information on the turkey-tryptophan myth, click [HERE](#).

6. Stop eating and drinking at least 3 hours before bedtime.

When your body is digesting, it is not resting. And, too much food in your stomach makes it difficult to digest your food in a timely manner. This can lead to symptoms including, belching, gas, heartburn and stomach pain which are not synonymous with peaceful sleep.

In addition, excess liquids too close to bedtime can lead to multiple trips to the bathroom during the night sabotaging your quest for sweet dreams.

For restful slumber with minimal sleep interruptions, keep dinner portions reasonable and stop all food and liquids at least 3 hours before you plan to go to sleep.

7. Eliminate alcohol late in the evening.

Though drinking alcohol can make some people sleepy, multiple research studies have shown that alcohol disrupts sleep during the second half of your nightly sleep cycle when you're most likely to be in REM sleep.

In addition, research shows the sleepiness some people feel from drinking alcohol will stop with regular nighttime drinking since the body develops a tolerance for alcohol with daily consumption.

[CLICK HERE](#) for some flavorful alternatives for alcoholic beverages.

Include some or all of these strategies in your daily nutrition habits to improve your sleep quality and enjoy the health benefits of adequate sleep!