



6 Tips for Eating Your Way Through a Sleep Deprived Day

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According to [a study](#) published in May 2017, people who don't get enough sleep eat, on average, **385 MORE calories** than usual with significantly less protein and more fat. They also experience a **heightened motivation to seek food for reward** (i.e. that donut and sweet coffee drink in the morning look more tempting than normal and one bite of a double cheeseburger with fries feels like you've won the lottery!).

Why you ask? Well, there's multiple reasons but one culprit is a change in appetite regulating hormones. When you don't get enough sleep, there is a **reduction** in leptin which signals feelings of fullness and an **increase** in ghrelin which signals feelings of hunger....translation: overeating!

You can see how easy it is to get into a viscous cycle when it comes to eating and sleep. You're tired from not sleeping and your appetite and cravings are increased because of the lack of sleep and hormonal shifts. You then overeat and/or make poor food choices which are likely high in sugar and processed carbs that cause your insulin and glucose levels to spike...and then crash...which leaves you more tired and fatigued. And the cycle keeps going and going...

BOTTOM LINE: If you don't get adequate sleep (for whatever reason...insomnia, work, children, aging parents...life!) you will likely be tempted to eat more and more "junk" than normal.

So, let's break the cycle and use food as fuel to get you through even the worst sleep deprived days! Here's how to do it.

1. Eat a healthy breakfast within about an hour of waking

- Boosts mood, metabolism and cognitive function (win, win, win!).
- Avoid blood sugar highs and lows by avoiding **processed carbohydrates and added sugars!** Just say NO to donuts, pastries, most cereals, sweetened yogurts, etc.
- Opt for a balanced breakfast with adequate protein and healthy fat that will sustain energy and power you through the morning.
 - **Protein** from eggs, plain Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, lean meats, clean protein powders, etc
 - **Healthy Fats** from avocado, coconut or olive oil, nuts/seeds, nut butters, etc
 - **Nutrient Dense Carbohydrates** from whole fruit, steel cut oats, sweet potatoes, veggies, etc

2. Rehydrate

- Dehydration can cause you to feel fatigued. Drinking more water should help you feel more alert and awake.
- Start your day with a glass of water and continue drinking throughout the day. Keep a water bottle with you at all times to help make this an easier habit.
- **BONUS: ↑ water = ↑ bathroom breaks = ↑ movement and ↓ chances of falling asleep at your desk!**

3. Sip (or sniff) coffee...but not too much

- Caffeine temporarily interferes with the chemical signals of sleepiness. The attention-boosting and alertness effects may not kick in for **30 minutes** so time your cup of joe accordingly!

- Not a coffee drinker? Can't or don't want to consume caffeine? Simply breathe in the scent of coffee or opt for decaf. [Research](#) suggests the aroma of coffee beans alone can alter the activity of genes in the brain and reduce the stress of sleep deprivation.
- **BUT...don't drink too much OR too late in the day OR with added sugar.**
 - Since coffee is a stimulant, it can suppress appetite and provide "false" energy so don't let it replace healthy meals or snacks, which can provide real, longer-lasting energy.
 - Avoid having caffeine from [all sources](#) after noon. Drinking caffeine too late in the day can inhibit sleep.
 - Try having your coffee black or with simply milk or cream. Caffeine plus sugar is not a good combination and will end up crashing your energy!

4. Eat a light lunch- cancel your reservations!

- Avoid heavy, high fat, rich meals at lunch (and dinner for that matter- more below).
- Enjoy a lighter, more balanced lunch. Aim for 1/2 a plate of non-starchy vegetables, 1/4 plate of protein, 1/4 plate (or less) of nutrient dense carbohydrates and a little healthy fat!
 - **Protein** from chicken, beef, pork, fish, plain Greek yogurt, eggs, tofu, tempeh, beans, lentils, etc
 - **Non-starchy vegetables** from greens, broccoli, green beans, asparagus, pepper, onions, carrots, cauliflower, etc
 - **Nutrient dense carbohydrates** from sweet potatoes, winter squash, quinoa, beans, lentils, wild rice, whole fruit, etc
 - **Healthy fats** from nuts/seeds, avocado, olive oil, olives, etc

5. Have a strategic afternoon snack (if needed)

- If you start to feel {more} sluggish in the afternoon, reach for a strategic snack instead of sugar and/or caffeine.
- Avoid sugary, high carb snacks, as they will end up draining you of energy and increasing cravings due to the spike and crash in blood sugar. Instead, choose a snack that combines a nutrient dense carbohydrate with a lean protein or healthy fat:
 - **Nutrient dense carbohydrates** from whole fruit, vegetables, whole grain bread or crackers, air-popped popcorn, etc
 - **Lean protein/healthy fat** from cheese, hummus, nut butter, plain Greek yogurt, nuts/seeds, guacamole, hard-boiled egg, etc

6. Prepare your food in advance

- Make batch cooking your new best friend! Read more about **BATCH COOKING BASICS**.
- Preparing food in advance helps you feel more organized and ready to tackle the day as well as avoid those less healthy foods that are more tempting when you're sleep deprived.
- Lay out food the night before OR batch cook your entire weeks' worth of food on Sunday OR do something in between.

And finally, be mindful of what you eat for dinner. Don't throw all your energy conversation measures out the window by eating a meal that is going to inhibit your sleep the next night. For more sleep-inducing tips, check out these [7 Nutrition Strategies for a Good Night's Sleep](#) and [soothing night time tea recommendations](#)...your pillow awaits!