

## Healthy eating, healthy **SLEEP**

Sleep comes more easily to those who eat better, writes Boudicca Fox-Leonard.

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We have finessed our bedtime routines, absorbed the science of circadian rhythms, cleared out the bedroom clutter, battened down the blinds, and left our phones at the door to ensure our sleep hygiene is spick and span. And yet, a good night's rest remains as elusive as ever for many of us.

But what if, instead of buying weighted blankets and sleep trackers, rethinking the supermarket shop could be the key to a better kip?

New research shows that what we eat can have a significant effect on the quality of our sleep.

A study recently published in the Annual Review of Nutrition journal, based on research by Columbia University in New York, found that eating a diet containing plenty of fruit and vegetables, plus legumes and dark whole grain breads, is associated with better quality sleep.

Rob Hobson, nutritionist and author of *The Art of Sleeping*, is not surprised by the study's findings.

"People who eat more fruit and vegetables generally have a healthier life overall.

"They're probably eating less sugar and drinking less alcohol. What's more, many plantbased foods contain nutrients shown to help with sleep, such as magnesium, tryptophan and B6," Hobson says.

Here, he guides us through which foods harm and which help your sleep, and why.

### FOODS THAT HARM YOUR SLEEP

Food and nutrition surveys have shown that adults eat twice the recommended maximum amount of six teaspoons of sugar a day. White sugar is referred to as a "free" sugar, which is found in all sweeteners (including honey, agave and fruit syrups).

Eating a lot of sugar can impact on your quality of sleep, and pull you out of a deep sleep.

One study showed that high sugar consumption led to less deep sleep and more wakefulness.

Sugar might also inhibit sleep, as it causes the release of a hormone called norepinephrine, which can stimulate the brain. be putting on weight, which will disrupt your sleep. Heavy foods are not good if you suffer from indigestion and reflux. That is going to affect your sleep as well. A better approach would be a piece of lean meat, such as fillet steak, with salad and maybe a little rice.

Everyone should watch their red meat intake. Going for poultry (chicken or turkey) would make your evening meal slightly healthier.

If you suffer from indigestion or reflux, then high-fat foods can aggravate these, and keep you awake. They can also cause you to put on weight and, if you are overweight, you are more likely to snore or suffer from sleep apnea.

Tyramine is an amino acid found in cheese. There may be some truth in the old wives' tale cautioning against eating cheese before bedtime; cheese – as well as bacon, ham, aubergine, and red wine – contains a substance called tyramine, which has been linked to migraines.

### FOODS THAT HELP YOU SLEEP

The health benefits have been widely researched, and a Mediterranean diet has been shown to help in all areas of health.

Essentially, it involves a high intake of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and cereals, a moderate intake of fish, a low to moderate intake of dairy foods, and a low intake of beef and poultry.

It also means a high ratio of monounsaturated fats to saturated fats. They can be found in olive oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds.

Tryptophan has a lot of competition to make it across the blood-brain barrier, but including foods rich in carbohydrates, such as pasta, potatoes and rice, in your diet can increase its uptake. These foods elevate the hormone insulin, which helps the uptake of tryptophan in several ways.

A combination of tryptophan-rich foods teamed with carbohydrates may provide the perfect evening meal. Example dinners include turkey stir-fry with white rice, salmon with white pasta and pesto, and vegetable chilli with rice or quinoa.

Ironically, white carbohydrates are better than whole grain ones in supporting tryptophan transfer, because they are broken down more quickly, and the release of insulin is more rapid.

This is a mineral required to convert tryptophan to melatonin, the hormone that makes you feel drowsy, and research published in the journal, *European Neurology*, has found that disturbances in sleep, especially during REM, may be related to low levels of calcium.

Be sure to include a good supply of calcium in your diet, with milk, yoghurt, cheese, tofu, dark green leafy vegetables, beans and pulses, squash, and canned fish.

This vitamin is involved in the production of melatonin, the hormone that controls the sleep-wake cycle.

Most of us get enough vitamin B6 as it is available in many foods, but it is also easily depleted as a result of stress or excessive alcohol intake.

While planning your sleep diet, be sure to include plenty of foods rich in vitamin B6 to keep levels topped up, such as pulses and lentils, liver, oily fish, poultry, bananas, soya foods, beef, lamb, and pork.

#### WHEN TO EAT BEFORE BEDTIME?

It all depends on lifestyle, how much you eat at mealtimes, and what body weight you are trying to achieve.

It might be beneficial to eat protein and fiber-rich foods that are satisfying at night, because the evening is when most people scuffle around in the kitchen for snacks.

However, some may choose to eat lighter in the evenings, preferring not to feel too full when they go to bed. – The Telegraph