- Hormones / Sleep

Why do I get sleepy after a good lunch?

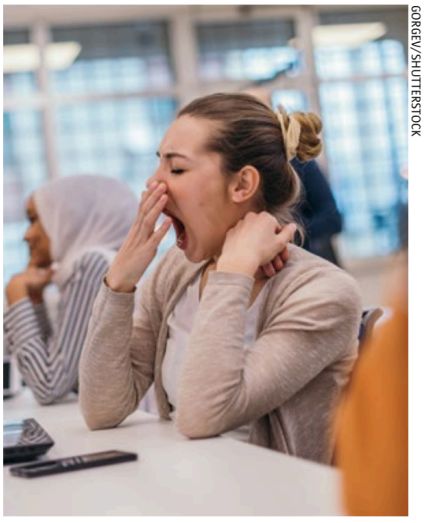
CHRONOBIOLOGY A meal triggers several processes that together can make you want to sleep. When you eat your lunch, your blood sugar levels will immediately rise to give you energy. But afterwards the blood sugar levels quickly drop again, which may cause sudden fatigue.

However, other factors are just as important – such as the neurotransmitter serotonin. Its levels increase after a meal, which makes you feel good, but with the side effect of also making you drowsy.

The same goes for the hormone melatonin, which helps control the balance between sleep and wakefulness. A meal can increase melatonin production, making you tired.

Melatonin production is regulated by roughly 20,000 cells in the SCN brain centre. When the centre is active, it suppresses the production of melatonin to keep you awake. But SCN activity takes a slight dip in the early afternoon, around 1-3PM, which is why you suffer a particularly high risk of becoming sleepy from melatonin shortly after lunch.

If you want to avoid the urge to nap after lunch, try choosing a meal without turkey, lamb, cod, salmon, cheese or eggs. These foods are all rich in the amino acid tryptophan, which is a building block of both serotonin and melatonin.



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