

Alice in *weight-loss* wonderland

You are WHEN you eat!

Does when you eat matter as much as what you eat? Health writer and type 1 diabetic Alice Dogruyol investigates.

WE ALL KNOW THE USUAL weight-loss advice: move more, eat less, cut sugar, drink more water. But lately, another tip keeps popping up: eat earlier. Not just earlier in the day, but finish your last bite by 6 or 7pm. It's part of a growing field called chrononutrition, and as someone who tries hard to wrap up dinner before sunset, I was curious to dig deeper into the science behind it.

Is when we eat really as important as what we eat? Could simply shifting mealtimes help with weight loss, blood sugar balance, and better sleep? I went digging into the research.

WHAT IS CHRONONUTRITION?

Chrononutrition is the science of syncing your eating patterns with your body's internal clock, or circadian rhythm. We're not machines that work the same way all day long; our metabolism, digestion, and hormone levels ebb and flow depending on the time.

The core idea is simple: eating earlier, when your body is biologically "awake", helps it metabolise food more efficiently. Eating late, when everything is winding down, can lead to sluggish digestion, fat storage, and disrupted sleep.

THE SCIENCE

Our circadian rhythm is set by the brain's master clock, which responds primarily to light. As the sun rises, cortisol rises too, helping us wake up and start burning energy. As the day fades, melatonin is released, preparing us for rest – slowing down digestion and metabolic processes.

Insulin sensitivity follows a similar curve: it's generally higher in the morning and tapers off as the day progresses. That means the body is better equipped to handle carbohydrates earlier in the day.

Eating earlier gives the body more time to process food before sleep. And that matters. Late-night eating means insulin is still working overtime when the body should be repairing itself – a metabolic mismatch that doesn't end well.

THE DANGERS OF THE LATE NIGHT FRIDGE RAID

We've all been there: it's late, you're tired, and the fridge starts whispering sweet nothings. You're not truly hungry, but a handful of granola or a slice of cheese feels like a comforting way to end the day.

Here's the problem: by 10:30pm, your body is shifting gears into deep rest mode. Melatonin is high, digestion slows dramatically, and your metabolism cools off. This is also when growth hormone – your body's natural fat-burner and repair agent – begins to rise. Growth hormone released during deep sleep helps burn fat for energy, repair muscle tissue, regenerate cells, and balance blood sugar overnight.

But late-night eating blunts this critical pulse. An insulin spike from that "harmless" snack shifts the body out of fat-burning mode and into food-digesting mode. Instead of tapping into stored fat overnight, the body scrambles to manage





THE SEASONAL STRUGGLE

It's interesting to note how much easier early eating feels in winter. When it's dark by 5pm, dinner at 6 feels natural, but in summer, with sunlight lingering until 9:30, it can feel oddly premature. That's because our circadian rhythm is regulated by light exposure, and melatonin – the hormone that signals the body it's time to rest – is highly light-sensitive. In winter, melatonin begins to rise earlier in the evening, prompting drowsiness, reducing appetite, and slowing digestion. In contrast, longer summer days delay melatonin production, keeping us more alert, socially active, and hungry later into the evening. While chrononutrition encourages earlier eating, it's ultimately about aligning with nature's cues. Our hormones, digestive function, and even the gut microbiome adapt with the seasons.

blood-sugar swings – leading to disrupted sleep, fat storage, and impaired recovery.

And let's be honest: late-night snacks are rarely boiled eggs or celery juice. They're usually mindless, carb-heavy comfort foods, eaten in front of a screen – which brings me to another problem.

THE SCREEN TRAP

Modern life makes it harder than ever to respect the body's natural rhythms. The blue light from our phones, laptops, and TVs tricks the brain into thinking it's still daytime. This delays melatonin release, throwing off the whole sleep-prep cascade – hormonal changes that affect blood-sugar control, hunger levels, and fat storage.

Disrupt your circadian rhythm with artificial light, and you're more likely to crave high-calorie foods late at night and

less likely to burn fat efficiently while you sleep. It's a vicious cycle – and one that makes maintaining a healthy weight so much harder.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Chrononutrition isn't about perfection; it's about rhythm. Eating in sync with your body's natural clock can support weight management, improve sleep, and boost energy. For me, aiming to finish by 6pm in winter months and 7.30pm in summer feels sustainable. But avoiding those late-night fridge raids? That's a habit worth keeping.

You don't have to overhaul your life. But thinking about when you eat – just as much as what you eat – might be the small shift that makes a big difference.



Connect with Alice
at [instagram.com/
Alice_Dogruyol](https://www.instagram.com/Alice_Dogruyol).

Sign up to our newsletter at [topsante.co.uk](https://www.topsante.co.uk)

TOPSANTÉ 41