

#HEALTH & FITNESS
BY MARINA FAROOK

Tips for sound sleep

Your sleep needs vary widely — total hours required, optimal bedtimes, and ideal wakeup times, these are all dictated by an individual's physiology, genetics, exercise levels, diet, and age group. Even the habits you formed as a child are influencing bed time habits, but whatever your needs are, getting adequate and effective sleep is crucial for your optimal daily functioning.

WHAT DOES SLEEP DO FOR YOU?

Neuro-science tells us that the space between brain cells increases during sleep, giving the brain the ability to clear toxins. Your brain forms new pathways for memory and knowledge acquisition and consolidates the learnings you accumulated during the day. After a good night's sleep, you have a greater attention span, make quicker decisions, and are more creative.

Physically, your body uses this time for organ repair — your heart, blood vessels, skeletal muscles, etc. While you are sleeping, your body has the time to produce more white blood cells that are necessary to strengthen and maintain your immune system. Benefits of your daily exercise routine are generated through your sleep cycle. Sleep also regulates hormones related to hunger (ghrelin) and satiety (leptin).

PROBLEMS WITH POOR QUALITY SLEEP
Do you feel hungry late at nights? This

comes to no surprise because staying awake late nights will force your sugar cravings through the roof. Your body has its own biological clock, the Circadian rhythm. Sleep and wake times are built into your DNA. Once you force your brain to stay awake longer than it should, you are forcing it to look for a quick source of energy.

Sleep also affects the way insulin is regulated in your body. Imbalances of insulin, ghrelin, leptin, and other hormones can impact metabolism, calorie consumption, and body weight,



affecting many aspects of health, wellness, performance, and personality on a day-to-day basis.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SLEEP

At the end of the day, you are as efficient as your sleep. In order to boost your body and



brain performance, sleep is your number one tool to transform into your best self.

Get sunlight by going outside within 30-60 minutes of waking up. Do that again in the late afternoon, prior to sunset. Sunlight on skin promotes serotonin (hormone that promotes calm and focus) which is converted to melatonin (sleep hormone).

Wake up at the same time each day and go to sleep when you first start to feel sleepy. Going to sleep too late is one reason people wake in the middle of the night and can't fall back asleep. Avoid caffeine within 8-10 hours of bedtime. Switch to decaf coffees and caffeine-free organic energy boosters.

Avoid viewing bright lights — especially bright overhead lights between 10PM

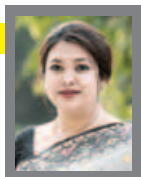
and 4AM. Here is a simple rule: only use as much artificial lighting as is necessary for you to remain and move about safely at night. Viewing bright lights of all colours are a problem for your Circadian system. Candlelight and moonlight are fine.

Use your nutrition to nourish your body with magnesium rich organic foods that do not cause inflammation on your body. Trans fat (oils) and sugars are disturbing the balance of your hormones. Focus on quality organic proteins and essential fats.

Clear your mind! Unload your brain by writing down what bothers you. This will help organise your thoughts and make daunting tasks easy.

Photo: Marina Farook**A NOTE ON NUTRITION**

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The connection between sleep and diet is not a simple one. Many aspects, including physical and mental health, exposure to light, and other underlying physical issue, affect sleep. Diet too is multifaceted. Individuals can have distinct reactions to different diets, making it hard to generalise about the perfect regimen to good eating for everyone.

Getting good sleep is extremely important for overall health. It keeps our brain healthy, and boost the immune system. Insufficient or poor quality sleep is linked with a wide variety of health problems, including, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and depression.

Sleep is regulated by hormones and chemicals in the brain; the food we eat can affect the levels of these chemicals namely, melatonin and serotonin, tryptophan, etc. There is no single food that is guaranteed to help with sleep rather there are strategies, which can help us sleep better. These include making changes to our diet, among many things.

WHAT TO EAT TO GET GOOD SLEEP**Almonds and other nuts**

Almonds are a rich source of healthy monounsaturated fats, fibres, and antioxidants. They are also excellent sources of nutrient like magnesium. Nuts are great sources of melatonin, which regulates our 'physical clock' and signals the body to

prepare for sleep! Magnesium helps people suffering from insomnia. It helps reduce levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.

The fatty acid found in walnuts may also contribute to better sleep. They supply alpha-Linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fatty acid, which is converted to DHA in the body. DHA may increase serotonin production. If you struggle to sleep, eating



some almonds or walnuts before going to bed may help. A handful is an adequate portion.

WHITE MEAT

White meat may be a great food to eat before bed due to its high amounts of protein and tryptophan, both of which may induce tiredness. Fatty sea fishes have innumerable health properties. They are high in omega-3 fatty acids, specifically eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and

docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

The combination of omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D in fatty fish has the potential to enhance sleep quality. They both increase the production of serotonin.

Dairy products and fruits

Milk, cottage cheese, and plain yoghurt are known sources of tryptophan. Research



indicates that milk can improve sleep in older adults, especially when paired with light exercise. The tryptophan and B vitamins in dairy products may act as natural sleep aids. Bananas also contain tryptophan and the fruit is also a modest source of magnesium. Kiwis are rich in serotonin and antioxidants, and cherry contains the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin.

WHITE RICE AND OATMEAL

Eating foods with a high glycaemic index

(GI), such as white rice, at least 1 hour before bed may help improve sleep. However, white rice should be consumed in moderation due to the comparative low amounts of fibre and nutrients they contain.

Similar to rice, oatmeal is high in carbs. Additionally, oats are a known source of melatonin.

WHAT TO AVOID

Caffeine! The body takes about six hours to metabolise caffeine, so drinking or eating foods with high caffeine content is not suggested in the afternoon or evening when its effects can keep us up at night. Sugary beverages and sweets are tied to bad sleep. The impact of carbohydrates on sleep is influenced by what is consumed with them. A combination of protein and carbohydrates may make it easier for the tryptophan present in protein rich foods to reach the brain.

AVOID EATING TOO LATE

Some foods may help with sleep in general, they are less likely to be effective if sleep hygiene is poor. Noisy atmosphere, bright lights, sleeping with electronic devices switched on may suppress melatonin production and counteract the benefits of sleep-promoting food.

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed