

# BEST FOODS TO HELP YOU SLEEP



There are four main vitamins and minerals that can be found in food that aid in promoting sleep: tryptophan, magnesium, calcium, and B6. Some of these substances help the body produce melatonin, the hormone that is responsible for regulating your circadian rhythm (sleep/wake patterns). When you're close to bedtime, melatonin production naturally increases to help you sleep. In the morning when you're ready to wake up, melatonin production tapers off to allow you to be awake and alert for the day.

Some foods are naturally packed with these essential vitamins and minerals, and eating certain foods at certain times can help you tip the scales towards a successful night of quality sleep. Most of these are available as over-the-counter supplements, but like with most supplements, it's better to get them from the foods you eat.

**Tryptophan** - Tryptophan is an amino acid that when ingested gets turned into the neurotransmitter serotonin and then converted into the hormone melatonin. Here are some of the best foods loaded with tryptophan.

- Dairy products (milk, low-fat yogurt, cheese)
- Poultry (turkey, chicken)
- Seafood (shrimp, salmon, halibut, tuna, sardines, cod)
- Nuts and seeds (flax, sesame, pumpkin, sunflower, cashews, peanuts, almonds, walnuts)
- Legumes (kidney beans, lima beans, black beans split peas, chickpeas)
- Fruits (apples, bananas, peaches, avocado)
- Vegetables (spinach, broccoli, turnip greens, asparagus, onions, seaweed)
- Grains (wheat, rice, barley, corn, oats)

**Magnesium** - Magnesium is a powerful mineral that is instrumental in sleep and is a natural relaxant that helps deactivate adrenaline. A lack of magnesium can be directly linked to difficulty going and staying asleep. Magnesium is often referred to as *the* sleep mineral. Excellent sources of magnesium are.

- Dark leafy greens (baby spinach, kale, collard greens)
- Nuts and seeds (almonds, sunflower seeds, brazil nuts, cashews, pine nuts, flaxseed, pecans)
- Wheat germ
- Fish (salmon, halibut, tuna, mackerel)
- Soybeans
- Banana

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avocados</li> <li>• Low-fat yogurt</li> </ul>
<p><b>Calcium</b> - Calcium is another mineral that helps the brain make melatonin. A lack of calcium can cause you to wake up in the middle of the night and have difficulty returning to sleep. Calcium rich diets have been shown to help patients with insomnia. Dairy products that contain both tryptophan and calcium are among the best sleep inducers. Sources of calcium include.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dark leafy greens</li> <li>• Low-fat milk</li> <li>• Cheeses</li> <li>• Yogurt</li> <li>• Sardines</li> <li>• Fortified cereals</li> <li>• Soybeans</li> <li>• Fortified orange juice</li> <li>• Enriched breads and grains</li> <li>• Green snap peas</li> <li>• Okra</li> <li>• Broccoli</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vitamin B6</b> - Vitamin B6 also helps convert tryptophan into melatonin. A deficiency in B6 has been linked with lowered serotonin levels and poor sleep. A deficiency in B6 is also linked to symptoms of depression and mood disorders which can lead to insomnia. Highest sources of B6 are.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sunflower seeds</li> <li>• Pistachio nuts</li> <li>• Flaxseed</li> <li>• Fish (tuna, salmon, halibut)</li> <li>• Meat (chicken, tuna, lean pork, lean beef,)</li> <li>• Dried Prunes</li> <li>• Bananas</li> <li>• Avocado</li> <li>• Spinach</li> </ul>
<p><b>Melatonin</b>- Many of the vitamins and minerals that are on this list are there because they help aid in the production of turning serotonin into melatonin. However, there are a few excellent sources of naturally occurring melatonin in foods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruits and vegetables (tart cherries, corn, asparagus, tomatoes, pomegranate, olives, grapes, broccoli, cucumber)</li> <li>• Grains (rice, barley, rolled oats)</li> <li>• Nuts and Seeds (walnuts, peanuts, sunflower seeds, mustard seeds, flaxseed)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drinks</b> - it's not just foods that are great for sleep. Many drinks contain essential vitamins and minerals that help aid with sleep. A few of the ones to try are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm milk – not an old wives' tale</li> <li>• Almond milk</li> <li>• Valerian tea</li> <li>• Chamomile tea</li> <li>• Tart cherry juice</li> <li>• Passion fruit tea</li> <li>• Peppermint tea</li> </ul> <p><i><b>NB – not all teas are researched to assist sleep but they will not harm, taste nice and can be an important part of a bedtime routine.</b></i></p>	



## The Worst Foods for Sleep

Just as there are foods and drinks that help promote sleep, there are also foods to avoid that can rob you of sleep. Many of the foods to avoid on this list are healthy for you to eat, but just not recommended to eat before bed because they can interfere with sleep. Some of them are:

- **Foods and drinks that contain caffeine.** Drinks containing caffeine such as coffee, or even energy drinks like Monster or Red Bull can really help you if you're feeling tired and just need a little pick-me-up to get the day going. However, it's not recommended to drink caffeine after lunch (and especially near bedtime), as it can interfere with sleep by keeping your mind overactive. Foods with dark chocolate are also high in caffeine and should be avoided late in the day.
- **Spicy foods.** While spicy foods are often delicious and even have many noted health benefits, eating spicy foods too close to bedtime can be a very bad idea. Spicy foods are notorious for causing heartburn, indigestion, and acid reflux. Heartburn can be made worse while lying down as it allows the acids to creep up into the oesophagus and burn the sensitive lining.
- **Alcohol.** Contrary to popular belief alcohol does not help promote sleep. While it can make you drowsy and more likely to fall asleep faster, it often disrupts sleep and can deter you from entering the deeper, much needed phases of the sleep cycles.
- **Foods high in fat** have been linked to poor, fragmented sleep. Fat triggers the digestive processes and causes a build up of stomach acids, which while lying down can creep into the oesophagus causing discomfort. A high fat diet also messes with the production of orexin, one of the neurotransmitters that helps regulate your sleep/wake cycle along with melatonin.
- **Foods high in protein** can also disrupt sleep when eaten too close to bedtime. Protein is tougher for the digestive system to break down. Eating protein rich meals near bedtime causes the body to spend more time working on digestion rather than focusing on sleeping.
- **Foods containing water** such as watermelon and celery are natural diuretics that help push water through your system. Eating these types of foods and drinking anything too close to bedtime can cause you to lose sleep from middle of the night bathroom trips.
- **Heavy meals before bedtime.** As with most things in life, moderation is the key. Even eating too much of the recommended foods before bed can cause you to lose sleep because your body is focused on digestion. If you find yourself hungry before bed, a light snack is recommended. The best light snacks are those that contain tryptophan and calcium such as a bowl of cereal, cheese and crackers, or peanut butter on toast.