

What to eat for great sleep

A checklist for Health-Conscious Homemakers

Diet is an essential component of overall wellbeing, this much we know. But a great night's sleep — undisturbed, from deep to REM, and at least 7-8 hours — is the ground zero of good health. While we sleep our body repairs itself, destroying any rogue cells and clearing sticky waste plaque from our brains. So, alongside my Better Bedroom tips (see end of PDF), here's your one-stop checklist on how to supercharge your shut-eye with food!



1 BETTER GUT, BETTER SLEEP

Poor sleep is a fast track not only to a poor appetite but also a compromised gut, and good gut health is upstream of everything to do with good health.

Prebiotic and probiotic supplements are often touted as the answer, and they are seemingly added into everything these days. However, I think it's always better to take them as they occur naturally in food. *Probiotics* are foods that contain live microorganisms intended to maintain or improve the "good" bacteria in the body, eg kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha, miso and live yoghurt. *Prebiotics* are foods (typically high-fibre) that act as food for those bacteria, think oats, mushrooms, chicory, asparagus, leeks, garlic and onions. (See Note 3 too on Better Snacks for Better Sleep).



2 BETTER HYDRATION, BETTER SLEEP

Dehydration can have a huge impact on sleep. Obviously, you can't drink while you're out for the count, and if you drink too much right before bed, needing to go to the loo will inevitably wake you. Plus, we lose water overnight, from half to one litre, mostly through our breath, and some from sweat. The key to not getting dehydrated then is to drink steadily throughout the day (six glasses of filtered water minimum, more if it's hot or you're exercising). Start with a large glass first thing, and add a slice of lemon to act as a gentle cleansing rev for your system. Being dehydrated before you go to bed can cause cramps and restless legs which will keep you awake. You might also wake with a headache. A relaxing drink before bed might be warm oat milk or chamomile tea, and non-vegetarians could try bone broth as this is super- high in glycine, an amino acid that's been found to improve sleep quality. Finally, one small study showed that drinking a cup of tart cherry juice one hour before bed helped chronic insomnia sufferers to sleep longer and deeper. Be sure to choose a brand *without* added sugar though if you give this a try!

3 BETTER SNACKS, BETTER SLEEP

Tryptophan is your sleep helping friend. This is an essential amino acid that turns into the happy hormone serotonin before being converted into melatonin which governs your sleep/wake cycles, so great for mood as well as sleep. However, being an *essential* amino acid means that the human body requires it, but doesn't make it, so we must consume it through food. Luckily it's in turkey, salmon, lamb, eggs and dairy products, as well as many nuts, pumpkin and chia seeds, oats and soybeans. So, a great bedtime snack could see you sprinkling nuts and seeds on a bowl of organic natural yoghurt, topped off with sour cherries (they contain small amounts of melatonin) and a banana, and you'll be all set, as these contain Magnesium and Vitamin B, good levels of which are also associated with sound sleep (see next tip).

4 MORE MAGNESIUM, BETTER SLEEP

Everyone could probably do with more of this mineral. Magnesium not only supports a balanced central nervous system and relaxed muscles, but also helps to regulate that all-important melatonin. Excellent sources include dark, leafy greens such as spinach and kale (nettles too if you fancy a forage), as well as nuts and seeds like almonds, cashews, and pumpkin seeds; also dark chocolate and avocados. Additionally, whole grains like quinoa and brown rice can help to boost magnesium levels. Luckily, it's also easily absorbed through the skin so one of the easiest ways to top up your levels is to toss a handful of magnesium salts (inexpensively available online) into your evening bath. Soak for 20 minutes and it's a win/win easy doze off scenario.

5 MORE VITAMIN D, BETTER SLEEP

The sunshine vitamin also helps us to produce melatonin. Unfortunately Vitamin D deficiency is common. Recent NHS statistics estimate that one in five people are deficient. Why? We spend 90% of our time indoors and when we go out we're either covered up or slapping on the sun cream. The latter is obviously essential, but even 10 minutes without it in the morning during the summer could be beneficial. Foods rich in Vitamin D include oily fish like sardines and mackerel, liver, red meat, and egg yolks. *Better You* do an oral spray which makes supplementation easy for vegetarians, and everyone during the winter.

6 MORE GOOD FATS, BETTER SLEEP

Low levels of Omega-3 fatty acids (which help all cells function as they should) have been linked to reduced melatonin and therefore poorer sleep. Oily fish (that's those sardines and mackerel again, about 8oz/week) are the best source, but Omega-3 fatty acids are also found in flaxseeds, walnuts, chia and hemp seeds, alongside our old favourites, green leafy vegetables such as spinach and broccoli. Sprinkle the nuts and seeds over porridge or yoghurt, and add ground flaxseeds to smoothies or biscuit recipes — superb for boosting your fibre intake too (See note 1!) Try this recipe *c/o Zoe Nutrition*: mix the following together in a bowl and then divide into twelve, roll into balls then flatten for cookies: 1 tbsp brown sugar; 3 tbsp olive oil; 2 tbsp ground flaxseed; 4 tbsp water; 200g ground almonds; 50g chopped nuts (I like pecans or walnuts); 80g dark chocolate; a pinch of salt — cook at 180 degrees C for ten minutes. Delicious *and* mega good for you!

4 ADDITIONAL GOOD SLEEP TACTICS

HOT BATH, COOL ROOM

As counter intuitive as it may seem, taking a bath before bedtime cools your core, which is proven to be beneficial to good sleep. However, your bedroom itself needs to be kept nice and cool, between 16-18 degrees is optimum.

FORGET THE NIGHT CAP

That relaxing night cap is not all it seems. Where coffee might perk you up being a stimulant, alcohol acts like a sedative. It's for this reason that people often think it helps you to sleep, as it knocks you out. Sadly, alcohol inhibits a critical stage of sleep called REM sleep, which is important for memory and emotional processing. A night deprived of REM sleep will leave you feeling ragged, not restored. Ideally, no alcohol then within three hours of bedtime; and regardless, best always with food.

NO CAFFEINE AFTER 2PM

Caffeine blocks the body's natural chemical processes that regulate circadian rhythms (our sleep wake cycles). While overriding sleepiness in the short term, a long-term repercussion of caffeine is the sabotage of your hormonal system. Plus caffeine has a half-life of about 5-7 hours, so your 4pm pick-up will still be having 50 percent of its impact by bedtime. As such, 2pm is a good cut off point. PS Decaf is not *no* caffeine, it's just *less* caffeine.

BUT YOU CAN READ!

In case you'd started to think there was nothing fun to do before sleep (aside from the obvious), a study conducted by the UK's University of Sussex found that reading for just six minutes before lights out reduced stress levels by 68 per cent!

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Now act on it! I really want you to experience the joy of a happy, healthy, and more supportive home.

START HERE → GO DEEPER → JOIN US

This guide is a small introduction to a bigger idea: that your home is not just where you live, but something that actively shapes how you feel, think and function.

I explore this philosophy more deeply on my Substack, [Better Home Better Health with Michelle Ogundehin](#) where I share research, reflections and practical ways to support your wellbeing through your space. It's free to subscribe.

And inside the Happy Insiders Club, we put it into practice — working together through monthly Room and Mood Resets, guided tools and a supportive community to help you create a home that truly supports you. Join us inside the Club [here](#).

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