

Sleep well naturally

A naturopath guides you about what foods help or stall you from sleeping sound

■ By David Lincoln

Sleep disorders are one of the most common misreported of all ailments. People ordinarily use expressions like, 'I didn't sleep a wink last night' or 'I haven't slept for many days' which are not literal. Since, it is clear that they have had enough sleep to operate functionally. If you have not had enough sleep, you will have trouble in organising your thoughts properly and in fact in just keeping awake. For most people, even the slightest delay in going to sleep on a regular basis can be very frustrating and definitely needs some attention. When an individual has not had enough sleep or has had an interrupted night, their mood, efficiency, focus and productivity, the following day, seems to be badly affected.

We know that people need different amounts of sleep, both from person to person and from age to age. A child certainly requires more sleep than an older person. You also require different amounts of sleep depending on what is going on in your life, for example, your body requires more sleep to recuperate after an illness or trauma and less sleep if you are living a peaceful and tranquil life.

A certain amount of sleep is needed every night for your brain to sort out its activities. When the brain is

in this sleep it can be easily identified by an onlooker, through the rapid eye movements that can be observed. This is known as REM sleep and is the most important type of sleep that the human body requires. The body requires rest, not always sleep but your brain most definitely requires a certain amount of sleep every night.

Do you know how much sleep you need each night?

From a naturopathic viewpoint, most body disorders are due to the various substances we put in our body by way of the food we eat, the drinks we take and the air we breathe. Sleep problems are no exception to this rule.

When we talk about food and sleep, one of the first things that must be considered is the time at which you eat, rather than the food you eat, although the food that you eat is also as crucial.

We have conditioned ourselves to eat food by habit, with breakfast, lunch and dinner at prearranged times regardless of whether we are hungry or not. Some of us are also finding our dinner time becoming later and later in the night.

Most medics, of all disciplines, will tell you that it is

not advisable to eat after 6pm, the logic being that your digestive system works best whilst standing rather than lying down. Naturopathy too, strongly advocates avoiding meals after it turns dark, as this is the time your body starts to wind down for sleeping. Having large meals late at night means that during the time that you wish to sleep, your digestive tract is fully engaged in the digesting of your food and the breakdown of your food into usable parts. All your organs of waste elimination are at full power, gurgling and bubbling away. Vegetarians, as a rule, tend to have fewer problems with sleep disorders relating to food, than non-vegetarians.

Some of the basic rules for eating foods are particularly important for your last meal of the day such as:

- Don't eat a big meal.
- Watch the foods you combine with other foods.
- Eat fruits first.
- Do not eat too many carbohydrates.
- Chew all your food well before swallowing.
- Have a short walk or light exercise after eating.
- Do not drink water with food as this dilutes the stomach acids.

Turn to specific things you eat and drink to help you sleep better. By far the best is a cup of chamomile tea about an hour before your bedtime. What you eat on a regular basis will affect not just your sleep but also your overall health. So by following a good healthy diet you can be assured of regular sleep.

The main chemical that your brain produces to help you sleep is melatonin and it is produced in absolute darkness or lack of light. So during the evening, switch off all unnecessary lights, this help your body produce melatonin naturally. A little tip here to help you sleep better is to prepare your bed well before you have to go to it, so that you do not need to turn on any more lights than are absolutely necessary when you finally retire to bed.



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A very important rule for good sleep is to cut out caffeine. Caffeine can cause sleep problems up to 10 – 12 hours after drinking it. Therefore avoid drinking any drinks containing caffeine after lunch and cut back your overall intake, especially if you are experiencing sleeping problems.

If you must eat close to bedtime, it should just be a light snack which contains tryptophan. Since this is the basic material that the brain uses to build melatonin. The good news is, adding certain foods can increase your odds to a successful slumber.

To help you sleep better your grocery list should include

Cottage cheese, cheese, milk, soy milk, tofu, soybean nuts, honey, almonds, banana, seafood, whole grains, beans, rice, oatmeal, hummus, lentils, hazelnuts, peanuts, avocado, eggs, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, flaxseeds, papaya, mushrooms and grapefruit.

The above foods could help you snooze better; however there are foods that can trigger sleep disturbances. Compounds like caffeine found in coffee would sabotage sleep since we consume coffee as a stimulant. Unfortunately, for people who have a sweet tooth it is essential to break the news that chocolate and most soft drinks [including diet soft drinks] have substantial amounts of caffeine. One of the worst is, paradoxically, alcohol. It might help you sleep for a short while and then keep you awake mainly due to the dehydration effect it has. Eliminating these foods from your evening meal routine is recommended for improved sleep.

Sleep bandits to avoid

Alcohol, nicotine, fatty or spicy foods, tomatoes, potatoes, salt and onions. For some of us, it won't be possible to completely eliminate these, but have them in very minimal amounts in dinner.

Do not spend time glaring at your night stand clock and contemplating all the things you did wrong in the day that are interrupting your sleep at night. Simply add and avoid from the above list of foods to get a good night's sleep.



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