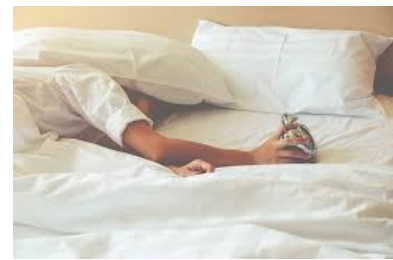


Feed Your Sleep

Nutrition practices to promote better sleep

Abby Johnson MS, RDN, LDN, CLT



Our diet can have an impact on our sleep patterns. Here are few ways that we can influence our sleep habits through the foods we eat. What you eat impacts how well you sleep, and how you sleep impacts what you eat. This cycle is what makes sleep one of the absolute most important factors contributing to your overall health, including your risk of chronic disease, maintaining a healthy weight, productivity during the day, and quality of life. Check out these practical dietary tips to help you get a better night's sleep.

- **Avoid caffeine, especially later in the day.** Some experts recommend avoiding caffeine up to eight hours before bed. In less sensitive individuals, avoiding caffeine 4-5 hours before bed may be sufficient. Keep in mind hidden sources of caffeine such as chocolate, sodas, decaffeinated coffee (yes it still has a small amount of caffeine), and teas.
- **Avoid alcohol close to bed time.** Alcohol does allow healthy people to fall asleep more quickly most of the time, but it reduces rapid eye movement (REM) sleep which is the restorative sleep needed to wake up fully rested.
- **Avoid eating large meals right before you go to bed.** When you eat large meals, your body spends a lot of energy working to digest the food you just ate and may not allow to get deep, restorative sleep.
- **Limit high sugar foods** in your diet. High amounts of sugar can lead to spikes in blood glucose levels throughout the day. Maintaining a more stable blood sugar during the day into the evening can help to lead to better sleep at night.
- **Magnesium** plays a role in supporting deep, restorative sleep by maintaining healthy levels of GABA, a neurotransmitter that promotes sleep. This mineral found in abundance in avocados, nuts, and legumes.
- **Tryptophan** is an amino acid associated with better sleep due to its ability to promote two neurotransmitters; serotonin and melatonin. Serotonin affects the brain and influences sleep, cognition, and mood. Melatonin is a hormone that helps to regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Less than optimal levels of either of these can negatively impact your sleep.
- **Melatonin** is a hormone that your body makes naturally to help regulate your sleep. Melatonin production increases naturally as the sun goes down and decreases in the presence of more sunlight. Some people take melatonin supplements to help them sleep. However, there are many foods that also naturally contain melatonin. Tart cherries or tart cherry juice contains the highest amount of melatonin followed by other foods like pomegranate, walnuts, rolled oats and flaxseed.

