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These 8 Foods Will Help You Sleep Better

USN ANGELA HAUPT | U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
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Dinner was a distant memory as soon as you polished off that plate – until hours later, when you were tossing and turning all night long. Indeed, what you put in your mouth can directly affect how many ZZZs come out.

"The majority of people with day-to-day insomnia could be sleeping like puppies if they made just a few changes," says sleep researcher Jacob Teitelbaum, author of "From Fatigued to Fantastic."

"And if you know how to eat right? You're going to be way ahead of the game." Consider these soothing, snooze-inducing foods:

1. Bananas

They're packed with potassium and magnesium — nutrients that double as natural muscle relaxants. Plus, they contain the sleep-inducing amino acid tryptophan, which ultimately turns into serotonin and melatonin in the brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that promotes relaxation; melatonin is a hormone that promotes sleepiness. It takes about an hour for tryptophan to reach the brain, so plan your snack accordingly.

2. Protein

High-protein foods promote sleep, and they also fight acid reflux, Teitelbaum says. That's important, since heartburn often flares up at night, making sleep difficult. Smart bets for a bedtime snack: two slices of lean meat or cheese, a hardboiled egg, some cottage cheese mixed with fresh fruit or a handful of pumpkin seeds.

3. Almonds

They're full of protein. They also provide a solid dose of magnesium, which promotes sleep and muscle relaxation. Chow down on a handful before bed, or spread some almond butter on toast.



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4. Milk

Downing a warm glass will encourage sweet dreams, says Donald Hensrud, a preventive medicine specialist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. Milk is full of tryptophan, so it will have a sedative effect. Plus, it's a good source of calcium, which helps regulate the production of melatonin. "If you can't sleep or if you're waking up in the middle of the night, get out of bed and have some milk," Hensrud says. Make it even sweeter with a teaspoon of honey.

5. Cherries

They're one of the only natural sources of melatonin, according to a study published in the Journal of Experimental Botany. Have a handful an hour before bedtime; if fresh ones aren't in season, go for cherry juice or the dried variety.

6. Tea

Green tea contains theanine, an amino acid that helps promote sleep. But really, all varieties are soothing enough to encourage drowsiness, so long as they're decaf. "Tea helps you relax," says Hensrud, who suggests herbal, mild flavors. Try a one-cup serving before turning in at night.

7. Oatmeal

Just one bowl provides plenty of calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, silicon and potassium — all sleep-promoting nutrients. Go easy on sweeteners, though, since too much sugar could sabotage shut-eye.

8. Jasmine rice

Having a bowl of rice four hours before going to bed could help you fall asleep faster, according to a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Researchers theorize that high glycemic-index foods like jasmine rice may boost tryptophan and serotonin, thus encouraging sleep. In the AJCN study, men fell asleep after an average of nine minutes. Make sure to stick with jasmine rice rather than opting for the lower glycemic-index long-grain rice.

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