



EAT RIGHT TO SLEEP WELL

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10 Foods Help Us Relax and Rest

by Judith Fertig

Getting enough sleep—or not—has a trickle-down effect. A study in the *Journal of Obesity* shows that good quality shut-eye helps us reduce stress, lose weight and function better.

Research also shows that most Americans would be healthier, happier and safer going about their daily activities if they slept 60 to 90 more minutes each night, according to the American Psychological Association. A consistent sleep routine helps enable a good night's rest, with activities like going to bed at the same time whenever possible; shutting down the Internet, email and text messaging at least an hour before bedtime; and limiting intake of caffeine and alcohol.

Another best practice is eating foods that help us relax, fall and stay asleep. Four primary sleep-promoting vitamins and minerals naturally found in foods are tryptophan, magnesium, calcium and vitamin B₆. Some of these help the body produce melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating the body's sleep/wake patterns called circadian

rhythms. Others enhance serotonin, which carries nerve signals and relays messages in the brain related to mood and sleep.

Some foods are naturally packed with these essential vitamins and minerals, and eating certain foods at certain times can help us tip the scale towards a successful night of restful sleep.

1 Kiwi. Full of vitamins C and E, serotonin and folate, kiwi can help us sleep longer. In a study at Taipei Medical University, in Taiwan, researchers had participants eat two kiwifruits one hour before bedtime for four weeks. Total sleep time improved by 13.4 percent.



2 Soy. In a Japanese study published in the *Nutrition Journal*, researchers surveyed

1,076 participants between 20 and 78 on how often they ate soy products, which are rich in sleep-enhancing isoflavones. Those that ate the most soy foods enjoyed deeper, more sustained sleep. Researchers concluded that soy's isoflavones help regulate the sleep/wake cycle.

3 Tart cherry juice. A study by the University of Rochester, in New York, found that older adults drinking two, eight-ounce servings of tart red cherry juice daily, one in the morning and one at night for two weeks, enjoyed moderate sleep improvement, comparable to taking the herb valerian and melatonin.



4 Fish. Salmon, halibut, mackerel and tuna help boost



the production of vitamin B₆, which helps make melatonin. A recent study from the University of Pennsylvania published in *Scientific Reports* found that eating more fish led both to better sleep and improved cognitive function in children.

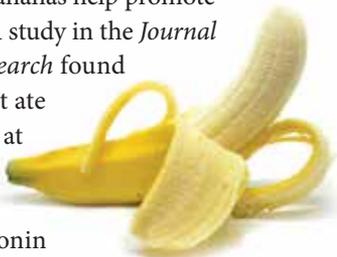
5 Fiber-rich foods. Choices such as chia seeds, nuts and whole grains help promote restorative “slow-wave” sleep, according to the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*.



6 Calcium-fortified yogurt. According to Dr. William Sears, a pediatrician in Pasadena, California, and author of *The Baby Sleep Book: The Complete Guide to a Good Night's Rest for the Whole Family*, “Calcium helps the brain use the amino acid tryptophan to manufacture the sleep-inducing substance melatonin. This explains why dairy products, which contain both tryptophan and calcium, are some of the top sleep-inducing foods.”



7 Bananas. Rich in potassium, magnesium, tryptophan and vitamin B₆, which are used to make melatonin, bananas help promote good sleep. A study in the *Journal of Pineal Research* found that men that ate two bananas at a time for a week had a rise in melatonin that reached a peak two hours later; pineapple juice and orange juice also raised those levels.



8 Walnuts. Eating a handful of walnuts an hour before bedtime provides

fiber- supporting, restorative, slow-wave sleep, concluded a study in the journal *Nutrition*. Plus, walnuts are a good source of tryptophan, which helps make serotonin and melatonin; University of Texas researchers also found that walnuts contain their own source of melatonin.

9 Dark leafy greens. Kale, spinach and collard greens are among the magnesium-rich greens that can help us de-stress and go to sleep, says Dr. Raj Dasgupta, a professor of pulmonary and sleep medicine at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.



10 Almonds and dates. Nerina Ramlakhan, Ph.D., a London sleep therapist and author of *Fast Asleep but Wide Awake: Discover the Secrets of Restorative Sleep and Vibrant Energy*, counsels her clients to start at breakfast by eating eight almonds and two dates. These two fiber-rich foods are able to slowly help produce melatonin for later in the day.



Judith Fertig writes cookbooks and foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).

A community needs a soul if it is to become a true home for human beings. You... the people, must give it this soul.

— Pope John Paul II