When Your Diet Gets in the Way

The foods you eat—and portions and timing—can interfere with restful slumber. Eat this way during the day for less tossing and turning.

BY DIANA KELLY LEVEY

THE CYCLE OF POOR sleep leading to an unhealthy diet is tough to avoid. If last night's sleep was terrible, you'll probably reach for sugary, carb-heavy foods and chug caffeinated beverages all day long for energy. Then you find yourself in bed at night, exhausted and unable to settle down and drift off.

When you're sleep deprived, chances are that your diet isn't as nutritious as it could be. "That lack of sleep could make you crave unhealthy foods, because you may be looking for a hug on your plate," says Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D.N., author of *Read It Before You Eat It—Taking You from Label to Table*. And it's not just a matter of

being tired and apathetic, she says. There are chemical changes taking place within your body—including the creation of out-of-whack hunger hormones—that will make it more difficult for you to crave healthy foods or to know how to stop eating when you're full.

"When you don't sleep much, you're up for more hours to eat more food," says Taub-Dix. "A lot of people confuse fatigue with hunger, or they think that if they eat, it'll help them stay awake longer—when what they need is [sleep]."

Here's what to eat—and drink—for better sleep:

Beware Heavy, Greasy, Fatty Foods
Sure, that greasy burger might make you feel sleepy after you ate it, but that's because your stomach works overtime to break

those foods down. "Rich or very fatty foods may cause GI upset," says Torey Jones Armul, M.S., R.D.N., spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "They can be harder to digest, and that may interfere with sleep."

Avoid High-Sugar, High-Carb Snacks
Similarly, stay away from treats like cookies and cake, because the spike in your

blood-sugar levels could make you hyper, disrupting your sleep in the process.

Opt for Less Heat
Spicy foods can irritate some people's digestive tracts. If you're experiencing indigestion after you're in bed, elevate your upper body a little bit and try to sleep more upright, suggests Jones Armul. If you're still struggling to fall asleep, do something else

for 30 minutes or read in bed while sitting up. "You're giving yourself time to let the stomach empty. Also, some water can help just kind of wash that acid back down—and then consider taking an antacid."

Cut Dinner Portions
A large meal too close to bedtime can also cause indigestion. "It can also lead to acid reflux when you lie down. Increased stomach

acid reenters the esophagus and causes pain," Jones Armul says. Eat a smaller dinner within a few hours of when you plan to sleep, and you should fall asleep faster.

Plan an Evening Snack
"I recommend you pick out your snack much earlier in the evening," says Taub-Dix. You might not even need it, if your dinner was satisfying. Almonds and walnuts are great snacks.

Ditch the Low-Carb Diet
One study found that very low-carb diets were linked to less time spent in REM sleep—the stage where you're dreaming—so try to avoid them.

Curb the Caffeine
You need to know your body's response when it comes to consuming caffeine. Some of us can drink coffee after dinner and fall asleep without issues; others are tossing in bed if they have caffeine in the early afternoon. "It's a stimulus, so be mindful of any kind of beverages with it," says Jones Armul. Most sleep experts recommend ending your caffeine consumption by 3 p.m.

Ask Yourself If You're Truly Hungry
"We often misinterpret tiredness for hunger," says Jones Armul. When you think you want to eat at night, it may just be that you're tired instead of really hungry. Ask yourself if carrots would suffice. If not, you're probably not physically hungry, she adds.

EAT A DINNER THAT'S LIGHTER AND PACKED WITH VEGETABLES FOR BETTER SLEEP.

Foods That Can Help with Sleep

Tart Cherries High in vitamins A and C, they're one of the few food sources of melatonin, which can help improve sleep quality.

Turkey Slices Poultry (and eggs and spinach) contains tryptophan, an amino acid that can increase your body's production of serotonin, the feel-good neurotransmitter, to help you feel sleepy.

Milk Another source of tryptophan, calcium may improve your sleep quality, notes Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D.N. Pair milk with carbs, like whole-grain cereal.

Wheat Bread with Peanut Butter Carbs help boost tryptophan and serotonin. Eat whole grains—bread, crackers or a rice cake—with protein like nut butter.

Bananas Eating a banana is a good idea because it contains magnesium and potassium, nutrients that optimize a good night's sleep.

Fruit Smoothie A snack before bed should have some carbs and protein and be easy to digest," says Torey Jones Armul, M.S., R.D.N. A smoothie with fruit, milk and yogurt provides that balance.