

# 11 Foods to Help You Get a Good Night's Sleep

By Leah Favela

You feel like you've tried everything; relaxing evening yoga, switching out your pillow, going to bed earlier, counting sheep...

But a good night's sleep still eludes you.

And let's face it. You're busy. You need to get as much out of your pillow time as you can, so when you wake up in the morning, you're ready to get things done.

You don't want to become dependent on sleeping pills, but you're tired of waking up barely feeling more rested than when you went to bed, even though you may have spent seven, maybe even eight hours, between the sheets.

So what can you do?

## The Science of Snacking

Making changes to your diet is a highly effective way to increase your sleep. From how long it takes you to fall asleep, to the duration, to how much good rest your body is getting, certain foods can help you catch some great zzzs.

A snack around one hour to 30 minutes before you hit the hay can help you get a good sleep and start the morning feeling rested and ready to take on the day with some pep in your step.

But wait. Isn't snacking late at night bad for you?

It was thought that eating close to bedtime negatively affected your health and could pack on some unhealthy pounds. And sure, if you're eating a few slices of pizza or a bag of potato chips just before bedtime, you're certainly not doing yourself any favors.

But recent studies have shown that eating small, nutrient-dense, low energy foods can positively affect your sleep.

This list will help you learn what foods you should be eating to help you sleep better because we don't want you reaching for those sleeping pills.

## The Power Players

Certain vitamins and minerals are known to positively affect anxiety, even out blood pressure, and regulate circadian rhythms. All of these are factors that can benefit your sleep.

Every food on this list contains at least one of the following vitamins or minerals. So let's take a minute to find out exactly what they do and why they help you sleep.

### **Magnesium**

To fall and stay asleep, both your body and brain need to relax.

Magnesium aids the relaxation process by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, the system that's responsible for getting you to feel relaxed and calm. Magnesium helps regulate neurotransmitters, those busy little impulses that send signals throughout your nervous system and brain.

It's as if magnesium is telling certain neurotransmitters, "Shh, chill out, it's time for bed."

Magnesium binds to gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) receptors. GABA is the neurotransmitter responsible for quieting down nerve activity and is present in many different sleep drugs.

So while magnesium is telling certain neurotransmitters to be quiet, it's encouraging other sleep-benefiting neurotransmitters to become more active.

Magnesium also regulates melatonin, which guides sleep-wake cycles in the body.

### **Calcium**

This mineral contains tryptophan, an amino acid the body uses to produce that wonderful, cycle-regulating hormone, melatonin.

Research has shown that low calcium levels are connected with disturbed sleep patterns, including little to no REM sleep. When calcium levels are too low, you may wake up soon after falling asleep and have trouble getting back to sleep.

## **B vitamins**

There are eight B vitamins in all, which also go by the names of thiamine (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), pantothenic acid (B5), pyridoxine (B6), biotin (B7), folate (B9) and cobalamin (B12). The collective composition of these eight vitamins is known as B-complex.

The best examined in terms of sleep from this group are vitamins B12 and B6, which have been known to combat depression and anxiety, two factors that lead to insomnia, the most common sleep disorder in adults.

B12 plays an essential role in synthesizing and metabolizing serotonin, the chemical that regulates our mood and keeps us feeling happy.

B6 helps the brain to not only produce serotonin but dopamine as well. While serotonin is more of an "awake" happy chemical, dopamine works at night when it helps to regulate other chemicals that can keep your brain overactive.

## **Potassium**

Potassium is a mineral and an electrolyte, and it's used by the body to conduct electrical impulses across cell membranes.

Studies have shown that potassium helps combat muscle soreness and cramps. It also reduces symptoms of anxiety and stress.

## **Vitamin C**

Much like the other vitamins and minerals in this list, vitamin C is a brain booster and can help with feelings of depression and anxiety.

Vitamin C plays a vital role in helping the body to maintain homeostasis (balance) in your central nervous system. And a balanced nervous system leads to a night of better sleep.

[One study](#) which examined the sleeping habits of a large group of people showed that lower vitamin C levels led to shorter sleep duration (typically 5 to

6 hours). The study also showed that those with low vitamin C levels woke up more throughout their sleep than subjects who did not have a deficiency.

Vitamin C also helps the body absorb iron, another mineral that plays an important role in sleep.

## **Iron**

Iron deficiency is one of the most common deficiencies in the world. Low iron levels can have a negative impact on your sleep, producing a whole slew of unwanted side effects.

Iron is essential for forming red blood cells, and having a low red blood cell count can lead to feelings of tiredness and fatigue. You might think this would help you sleep, but daytime fatigue is a massive contributor to night-time insomnia.

## **Vitamin D**

Low levels of Vitamin D can cause poor immune system functionality and is associated with certain emotional problems such as sleep affective disorder (SAD). Going to sleep unhappy or stressed will likely leave your brain sorting through all sorts of unwanted thoughts that will keep you awake long into the night.

A vitamin D deficiency can also make your muscles and joints feel achy, which will leave you shifting about uncomfortably throughout the night.

## **What Should You Eat?**

### **1) Kiwifruit**

Kiwifruit has numerous vitamins and minerals, and according to studies, it may be one of the best foods to eat before bed.

[In one 4-week study](#), adults who consumed two kiwifruits one hour before going to bed fell asleep 42% more quickly than if they didn't eat anything before sleeping. Both their ability to sleep through the night and the length of their sleep increased as well.

Researchers believe kiwifruit's benefits on sleep are related to the fruit's antioxidant properties, serotonin concentration, and ability to raise folate (B9) levels.

## 2) Bananas

Bananas are packed with magnesium, vitamin B6, and potassium that work together to help you fall asleep quickly.

Melatonin and tryptophan in bananas tell your body that it's sleepy time, while magnesium and potassium relax your muscles and reduce tension.

The vitamins and minerals in a banana can help reduce stress levels and aid in you falling to sleep faster.

## 3) Oatmeal

When you think of oatmeal, you probably think of breakfast. However, oatmeal is a good source of melatonin. Oatmeal also contains tryptophan, an amino acid the brain converts into serotonin. Calcium and magnesium are present in oatmeal as well.

Because it's a complex carbohydrate, oatmeal also triggers a rise in blood sugar which initiates insulin production and the release of sleep-inducing chemicals

For a warm, soothing pre-bedtime snack, cook a half cup of oats. To double the effects, top it off with some kiwifruit or banana!

## 4) Tart Cherries

Tart cherries have above-average concentrations of melatonin, which can help regulate your circadian rhythm and promote healthy sleep.

Cherry juice not only makes your pillow time more restful, but it also increases the amount of time you sleep. Studies have shown that just [16 ounces of tart cherry juice](#) can increase sleep time by an average of 85 minutes. And who wouldn't want over an hour of extra good sleep?

Tart cherry juice seems to be just as effective at fighting insomnia as valerian and melatonin, two natural supplements people often reach for to help them sleep. So drink up!

## 5) Chickpeas

Chickpeas, and yes, this means hummus, have good doses of tryptophan and folate. They also have a low glycemic index; the mix of fiber and protein in this food helps slow down carb absorption and maintain healthy blood sugar levels.

Maintaining even blood sugar levels is beneficial to your circadian rhythm; chickpeas can help prevent spikes and crashes of blood sugar levels resulting in improved sleep.

## 6) Flax Seeds

With their high amounts of magnesium, flax seeds can help to prevent restless leg syndrome and [night terrors](#), two things that can affect troubled sleepers.

High levels of tryptophan and omega-3 fatty acids found in flax seeds raise serotonin levels and reduce anxiety, depression, and stress.

These little brown seeds contain 20-25% of your recommended daily magnesium intake to fight insomnia and improve sleep efficiency and duration.

To maximize their effectiveness, sprinkle a tablespoon of flax seeds over your evening oats or a small cup of yogurt.

## 7) Nuts

Though the exact amounts vary from nut to nut, most contain melatonin and magnesium as well as zinc. In a [clinical trial using supplements](#), it was observed that this trifecta of minerals helped older adults with insomnia get better sleep.

The omega-3 fatty acids in nuts, specifically alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), convert to DHA in the body, which can help with serotonin production.

Pistachios, almonds, Brazil nuts, and walnuts have the highest concentrations of these minerals. Plus, they're low in sugar and high in fiber and just all-around good for you.

Eat a handful of nuts about 30 to 60 minutes before bed to see if they help you get the most out of your zzzs.

## 8) Kale

Kale is absolutely loaded with calcium which buddies up with tryptophan to produce that sweet, sweet melatonin.

One cup of kale contains 10% RDI of folate, potassium, and magnesium. It also contains 2.5 to 6.4 mg of iron for every cooked cup. It's one of the most nutrient-dense foods on the planet.

Not a fan of kale? Lots of leafy greens, like collards and broccoli, contain healthy amounts of sleep-supporting minerals as well.

## 9) Chamomile Tea

Tea doesn't technically count as a food, of course, but chamomile tea has long been a traditional remedy for insomnia. That's because chamomile tea contains apigenin, an antioxidant that binds to GABA receptors which have a sedative and relaxing effect.

Try drinking a cup of tea about 45 minutes before bed to give your body enough time to metabolize the tea and get the most out of those chemical compounds.

Research on the efficacy of chamomile tea on sleep isn't highly conclusive yet, but having a warm tea before bed can help you create a nightly ritual that might help you relax.

Getting enough sleep and quality sleep is so crucial for your health. And remember, not all pre-bedtime snacks are bad. In fact, most of these foods will probably help you sleep. At the very least, they're all full of healthy goodness. So get to snacking, and good night!