

12 Best Foods to Help You Sleep Better

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Good quality sleep is needed for good health. Not only does it keep you alert and focused while you're awake, your body needs this critical rest period to heal itself.

The magic sleep number for adults is between 7-9 hours each night.

Unfortunately, [research](#) on sleep patterns indicates that not only are many adults *not* getting this amount of sleep each night, the average hours of sleep per night have been *decreasing* over the last few decades. And besides simple lack of sleep, there's another aspect to consider: the quality of rest you're getting.

You may have the best intentions to get a good 8 hours of sleep but find yourself lying awake or tossing and turning throughout the night. When you wake up the next morning, it doesn't feel like you slept much at all.

Fortunately, there are natural changes you can make, like eating foods to help with sleep. Specific foods contain nutrients that promote sleepiness as well as better quality, deeper rest.

Here's a look at the top foods (and drinks) to eat for sweet dreams.

Top Foods to Help With Sleep

Tart Cherry Juice



Tart cherries are loaded with beneficial nutrients, most notably magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and antioxidants. The juice is missing the fiber content of the berries but becomes an even more concentrated source of nutrients.

In [research](#), tart cherry juice is one of the most consistent foods at inducing sleepiness and better quality sleep.

This is likely because several [studies](#) have shown that drinking tart cherry juice raises melatonin levels. Melatonin is commonly referred to as the “sleep hormone” because it’s heavily involved in controlling your sleep-wake cycle. Without enough melatonin, your brain doesn’t get the signal that it’s time to fall asleep.

Along with increasing melatonin, cherries also have a good amount of magnesium and potassium.

One of the [benefits of magnesium](#) is that it helps with the production and regulation of melatonin. Potassium is thought to be connected to staying asleep through the night.

Overall, tart cherry juice has [the potential](#) to extend sleep time by over an hour and improve sleep quality.

Almonds

Like tart cherries, almonds are one of the best foods to help with sleep because they can boost melatonin production. In fact, they are one of the best plant-based [dietary sources](#) of melatonin.

A one ounce serving of almonds also provides about 19% the daily value (DV) of magnesium, which as mentioned, is critical for melatonin production within your body. Magnesium can even [help decrease](#) levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. This further helps you to relax and fall asleep.

One ounce of almonds is about a handful, so you don't even need a large serving to get the benefits.

Walnuts



Walnuts share many sleep-boosting nutrients with almonds, especially melatonin and magnesium. They also contain fatty acids that may promote better quality sleep.

One of the major fatty acids in walnuts is alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), which is an omega-3. It gets converted to docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) within your body, and DHA appears to [increase serotonin levels](#). Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that has a lot of roles in the body. One of these roles is helping to regulate your sleep-wake cycle. It's also a chemical precursor to melatonin, meaning you need enough of it for your body to produce the right amount of the sleep hormone.

Ironically, too much serotonin can cause wakefulness, but [research](#) indicates that having enough of this brain chemical is crucial to a good night's sleep.

Oats

Oats may surprise you as one of the top foods to help with sleep. But they are yet another good source of melatonin and magnesium, like the previous foods on this list.

Even more surprising, oats have a good amount of tryptophan, the amino acid that may be forever associated with turkey. Tryptophan [plays a role](#) in the production of both melatonin and serotonin. It also helps your brain relax, which can induce drowsiness.

Unlike turkey, oats provide you with a good amount of fiber and are a [healthy complex carbohydrate](#). There's some [evidence](#) that eating carbs before bed promotes better sleep, too.

Kiwi Fruit



Kiwis are a highly nutritious fruit, packed full of [vitamin C](#). They also contain good amounts of potassium and folate (vitamin B9), along with trace minerals. Folate is an often overlooked nutrient in relation to sleep (as well as depression). It's [involved](#) in the synthesis of several neurotransmitters, including serotonin, and may help with insomnia. Deficiencies can cause sleep trouble.

In [one study](#), adults ate two kiwis one hour before going to bed for 4 weeks. They ended up falling asleep 42% more quickly than before, slept for longer, *and* slept better throughout the night.

Researchers still aren't sure why kiwi has such good sleep-promoting effects, but you may want to eat more of this small green fruit if you're having sleep troubles!

Leafy Greens

Certain leafy greens are great foods to help with sleep because of their calcium content. Kale, spinach, and mustard greens are at the top of the list.

Calcium is yet another essential nutrient for getting quality sleep. Though normally associated with bone health, calcium works with other nutrients within your body to promote restful sleep. It seems to be [especially connected](#) to deep REM sleep.

Adequate calcium intake (alongside getting enough other "sleep nutrients") [may help you](#) fall asleep more quickly and get more restorative sleep.

Lettuce is another green that surprisingly may aid sleep. Certain types contain a milky fluid called lactucarium, which has [sedative properties](#).

It's unclear how much lettuce you need to eat to feel drowsy, but romaine lettuce has the highest content of lactucarium. Combine it with other calcium-rich greens for greater effect.

Herbal Tea



While you don't want to drink caffeine-containing tea before bedtime, specific herbal teas have relaxing, sleep-promoting properties.

Two of the most studied teas to help with sleep are chamomile and passionflower.

Chamomile tea has a long history of use for stress and sleeplessness. Its main sleep-improving compound seems to be an antioxidant called apigenin. [Research](#) indicates that apigenin binds to receptors in the brain, promoting sleepiness and potentially reducing insomnia.

Studies using both chamomile tea and chamomile extract show that it can improve both [the time it takes you to fall asleep](#) and [sleep quality](#).

Passionflower also contains apigenin and appears to increase the production of gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA). GABA is a [brain chemical](#) that inhibits other stress-inducing brain chemicals, leading to a more relaxed state.

Passionflower [seems to have](#) benefits similar to chamomile for better quality sleep, so you can choose either one depending on taste preference. The two can also be combined into one herbal tea.

Certain Types of Fish

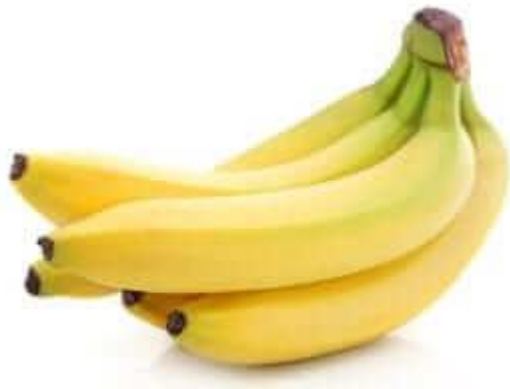
Fatty fish like salmon, trout, and sardines are top foods to help with sleep because of their vitamin D and fatty acid content.

[Vitamin D](#) is an incredibly important nutrient that acts as a hormone. It's vital for healthy immune function, mental health, bone health, and, of course, sleep. The connection between vitamin D and sleep isn't [yet clear though a deficiency is associated](#) with a greater risk of sleep problems.

The biggest “source” of vitamin D is sunlight, which enables your body to produce its own store of the vitamin. Fish are one of few food sources that will also give you a good amount of the sunshine vitamin.

Fatty fish contains the omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA as well. In combination with vitamin D, these omega-3s help with [serotonin synthesis](#) and may boost sleep quality. Because some fish can contain high levels of mercury, though, do opt for low mercury choices such as salmon, trout, and sardines if you do eat fish.

Bananas



Bananas contain a good amount of potassium and a modest amount of magnesium (about 8% DV in a medium banana). Both of these contribute to helping you fall asleep and sleep through the night.

A medium size banana also has about 11 mg. of tryptophan. This isn't a huge amount (turkey has 300-400 mg. per pound and oats have 147 mg. per cup), but it may be enough to help your mind relax at night.

Honey

Though you don't want to consume a lot of sugar at night, a little bit of raw honey can be a good bedtime snack. It also combines well with other foods to help with sleep like nuts, herbal tea, and oats.

Honey works as a sleep food by slightly raising insulin levels when you eat it. This allows tryptophan that may be present in your body to enter your brain where it gets involved in the production of serotonin and melatonin.

Although honey does contain a small amount of tryptophan on its own, you may want to eat it with another tryptophan food like oats to boost its effect.

Other Tryptophan Foods



The recommended daily amount for tryptophan is 250-425 mg. per day. Getting within this range ensures you have enough of this building block for restful sleep.

Oats, as mentioned, are the best plant-based source with about 1/2 the DV in one cup. Nuts and seeds are another good plant-based source of tryptophan (including walnuts and almonds) as well as whole grains. Chocolate (the less sweetened the better) can get you up to 18 mg. per ounce, and fruits like bananas, apples, and prunes have a modest amount of tryptophan.

Healthy Carbohydrates (Especially Whole Grains)

Eating a small amount of carbohydrates in the evening may help you sleep better. This is especially true of whole grains, which usually have magnesium and a medium amount of tryptophan. Grains also raise insulin slightly in a way similar to honey to allow tryptophan to enter your brain.

Tips for Eating Foods to Help With Sleep

Eating the right kinds of food can help you get better quality sleep, but *how* you eat also matters.

Having a large meal right before bed isn't a good idea, even if you're eating foods on this list. It means your digestive system will be active right when you are trying to fall asleep.

You can, however, eat sleep foods with dinner or have them as a small snack a few hours before going to bed. The same goes for herbal tea and tart cherry juice. Drink them 2-3 hours before sleeping so that you don't have to make a bathroom trip in the middle of the night.

Most of these foods should be eaten in the evening for the greatest benefit. Tryptophan-containing foods can be eaten throughout the day to make sure your intake of this amino acid is adequate.

Foods to *Avoid* Before Bedtime



Eating the right foods can help with sleep but there are others that may be sabotaging your rest.

High Fat or Spicy Meals

While carbohydrates and certain forms of protein are good evening foods, meals heavy on fat are not a great choice. Eating a lot of fat activates your digestive system in a way that may make you sleep less soundly. The same is true of spicy foods.

If your end-of-the-day meal tends to be heavy or on the spicy side, try to finish eating it at least 4 hours before going to sleep.

Caffeine

It may sound obvious that you shouldn't drink caffeine before bed, but it can have an affect on your sleep even before the late evening hours.

Everyone's body processes caffeine at a slightly different rate, but it typically takes 4-6 hours for it to leave your system entirely. This means you should cut off caffeine intake mid-afternoon to make sure it doesn't interfere with sleep quality.

Also, keep in mind that there are other sources of caffeine besides coffee and tea. Chocolate contains caffeine and even decaf drinks still contain a small amount. Depending on how sensitive you are to caffeine, you may want to go easy on these as well.

Alcohol

Alcohol is tricky when it comes to sleep. Many people enjoy drinking it in the evening because it's relaxing and can help you fall asleep more quickly.

Unfortunately, alcohol does *not* help with sleep quality. You may enjoy falling asleep faster, but you're more likely to wake up in the night, spend time tossing and turning, and even get night sweats.

Because of this, it's best to cut off alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.