**How to Improve Your Sleep**

**Circadian Cycle**- A natural physiological cycle of about 24 hours that persists even in the absence of external cues.

The cycles of light and dark that result from the movements of the sun and planets affect nearly all living creatures. Our sleep schedules are still very much in tune with the sun and our environment. Whenever light stimulates your skin or eyes, regardless of the source, your brain and hormonal system think its morning. In response to the light, your hormonal system naturally releases cortisol. Cortisol is an activating hormone that is released in response to stress, light being a form of electromagnetic stress. This activates the body and prepares it for movement, work, combat or whatever may be necessary for survival.

**Factors That Can Disrupt Your Sleep/Wake Cycles:**

1. Stimulants
2. Electromagnetic Pollution
3. Entrainment

**Points for Optimizing Your Sleep/Wake Cycles:**

* Get to sleep by 10:30 pm. If you need time to wind down before you sleep, make the appropriate adjustments.
* Minimize your exposure to bright lights, fluorescent lights, for at least 2 hours before going to bed. If you don’t have dimmer switches, try lighting your house with candles or lamps with low wattage light bulbs.
* Sleep in a room that is completely dark.
* Avoid the consumption of stimulants after lunch. If you’re unable to sleep well, be particularly mindful with desserts-especially ones that contain alcohol, sugar, or caffeine.
* Eat right for your metabolic type, particularly dinner.
* Drink plenty of water. Our bodies have very little water reserve, and once dehydrated, the body responds as though it’s experiencing stress.
* Exercise! You may find that sleep patterns are disrupted if you exercise after dinner, particularly if the exercise is intense. This can increase cortisol levels, making it hard to get to sleep.
* Try unplugging all electrical appliances in your bedroom.

***Other Tips to Help you Sleep Well:***

1. Try meditation or yoga before bed; deep breathing
2. Use black out curtains
3. Wear socks to bed-keeps your body heat in
4. Wear ear plugs-allows you to hear your heartbeat, blocks outdoor noises
5. Use an "eye pillow" that blocks out light, TempurPedic $35
6. Use an essential oil diffuser, air purifier

Best essential oils for sleep: lavender, chamomile, mandarin

1. Take the TV out of the bedroom
2. Wear non-restrictive clothing to bed
3. Take a warm bath w/ Epsom salt before bed
4. Drink herbal tea
5. Eat foods that contain L-tryptophan. (Also see below)

<http://www.healthinformationnews.com/health_by_category/Nutrition/nutrition_pages/Foods_L_Tryptophan.html> (foods containing L Tryptophan)

**FOODS THAT HELP YOU SLEEP**

Sleepers-tryptophan-containing foods, because tryptophan is the amino acid that the body uses to make serotonin, the neurotransmitter that slows down nerve traffic so your brain isn't so busy.

Wakers- foods that stimulate neuro-chemicals that perk up the brain.

Tryptophan-precursor of the sleep-inducing substances serotonin and melatonin. This means tryptophan is the raw material that the brain uses to build these relaxing neurotransmitters. Making more tryptophan available, either by eating foods that contain this substance or by seeing to it that more tryptophan gets to the brain, will help to make you sleepy. On the other hand, nutrients that make tryptophan less available can disturb sleep.

Eating carbohydrates with tryptophan-containing foods makes this calming amino acid more available to the brain. A high carbohydrate meal stimulates the release of insulin, which helps clear from the bloodstream those amino acids that compete with tryptophan, allowing more of this natural sleep-inducing amino acid to enter the brain and manufacture sleep- inducing substances, such as serotonin and melatonin. Eating a high-protein meal without accompanying carbohydrates may keep you awake, since protein-rich foods also contain the amino acid, tyrosine, which perks up the brain.

For students and working adults, high protein, medium-carbohydrate meals are best eaten for breakfast and lunch. For dinner and bedtime snacks, eat a meal or snack that is high in complex carbohydrates, with a small amount of protein that contains just enough tryptophan to relax the brain. An all- carbohydrate snack, especially one high in junk sugars, is less likely to help you sleep. You'll miss out on the sleep-inducing effects of tryptophan, and you may set off the roller-coaster effect of plummeting blood sugar followed by the release of stress hormones that will keep you awake.

Best bedtime snack- contains both complex carbohydrates and protein, calcium. Calcium helps the brain use the tryptophan to manufacture melatonin.

**SNOOZE FOODS**

These are foods high in the sleep-inducing amino acid tryptophan:

* Dairy products: cottage cheese, cheese, milk
* Soy products: soy milk, tofu, soybean nuts
* Seafood
* Meats
* Poultry
* Whole grains
* Beans
* Rice
* Hummus
* Lentils
* Hazelnuts, Peanuts
* Eggs
* Sesame seeds, sunflower seeds

**BEST BEDTIME SNACKS**

Foods that are high in carbohydrates and calcium, and medium-to-low in protein also make ideal sleep-inducing bedtime snacks. Some examples:

* apple pie and ice cream
* whole-grain cereal with milk
* hazelnuts and tofu
* oatmeal and raisin cookies, and a glass of milk
* peanut butter sandwich, ground sesame seeds (It takes around one hour for the tryptophan in the foods to reach the brain, so don't wait until right before bedtime to have your snack.)

**BEST DINNERS FOR SLEEP**

Meals that are high in carbohydrates and low-to-medium in protein will help you relax in the evening and set you up for a good night's sleep.

* pasta with parmesan cheese
* scrambled eggs and cheese
* tofu stirfry
* hummus with whole wheat pita bread
* seafood, pasta, and cottage cheese
* meats and poultry with veggies
* tuna salad sandwich
* chili with beans, not spicy
* sesame seeds (rich in tryptophan) sprinkled on salad with tuna chunks, and whole wheat crackers

Eat Lighter meals. High-fat meals and large servings prolong the work your digestive system needs to do, and all the gas production and rumblings may keep you awake.

Highly-seasoned foods (e.g., hot peppers and garlic) interfere with sleep, especially if you suffer from heartburn.

Do not go to bed with a full stomach. While you may fall asleep faster, all the intestinal work required to digest a big meal is likely to cause frequent waking and a poorer quality of sleep. Eat your evening meal early.

**FOODS THAT KEEP YOU AWAKE**

Caffeine-containing foods top the list of foods that wake you up.

-As a stimulant, caffeine speeds up the action of not only the nervous system, but of other major body systems, too. Within fifteen minutes of downing a cup of coffee, the level of adrenaline in your blood rises, which triggers an increase in heart rate, breathing rate, urinary output, and production of stomach acids. Basically, caffeine's effects are the reverse of what you want to happen as you go to sleep.

-Prompts adrenal hormones to release sugar stored in the liver, which stimulates sugar cravings to replenish the stores.

-Heightens the roller coaster effect of blood sugar swings, producing a quick high after a morning cup of coffee, followed by a downturn in the afternoon.

-Caffeine's effects in the body are sort of like the law of gravity: what goes up must come down. The morning jolt is often followed by afternoon doldrums. Caffeine also makes it difficult to sleep well.

**Know your caffeine quota.** Some persons are more caffeine-sensitive than others. Many adults can take up to 250 milligrams of caffeine a day (the average amount in 21/2 cups of coffee) and experience no sleep problems. Others get jitters after one cola.

**Time your caffeine boost.** For most people, the effects of caffeine wear off within six hours, so coffee in the morning will usually not interfere with sleep in the evening. Caffeine-containing beverages at lunch may not affect your sleep, but coffee, tea, or cola in the evening is likely to keep you awake.

1. Try "chocolate pillows" -small chocolates that contain melatonin- low in sugar, 50 calories. [www.dreamerz.com](http://www.dreamerz.com)
2. Have sex-releases serotonin, helps you to relax.
3. Listen to soft, peaceful music.
4. Drink warm milk with turmeric (almond milk may also be used)
5. Take a detox bath- 1 cup apple cider vinegar, 1 cup sea salt, 1 cup Epsom salt, 6 drops lavender essential oil.