

Sleep and Diet

How do we know that the quality of your sleep affects your diet? Studies show that inadequate amounts of sleep can increase your appetite, especially for foods higher in carbohydrates. Without enough sleep, our hormones don't work properly. Ghrelin, the hormone that is responsible for hunger, is produced at higher rates, while Leptin, the hormone that controls satiety, is produced at lower levels according to the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of The United States of America. This imbalance is what causes us to reach for that hotdog at lunch instead of a salad.

What you eat during the day not only gives you energy, but it can also affect your sleep. The food we eat throughout the day affects our hormonal balance and can actually help us sleep better or worse. There are certain foods and eating habits recommended by Dr. Karen Ensle, Extension Educator and Registered Dietitian with Rutgers Cooperative Extension that can stimulate a calming response from your nervous system and certain foods can stimulate it.

We can begin with caffeine that is in many beverages. Mostly likely, the reason you do not wake up feeling well rested even if you got 8 hours of sleep is because the quality of your sleep was poor. Caffeine can interfere with our sleep cycle and prevent us from falling into a deep sleep. Deep sleep is when your body repairs itself, strengthens its immune system and keeps those hormones in check. Drinking too much caffeine laden beverages throughout the day or drinking it later in the day can affect your deep sleep. Begin by reducing your total caffeine intake or cutting yourself off by 3 or 4 p.m. Or, better yet, try skipping caffeine for a day and see how your sleep quality improves.

Heavy meals late at night can also interfere with sleep. Large meals stimulate your digestive tract. There is an increase in blood flow and many hormones are being secreted. During digestion the nervous system is stimulated, not calmed, making it difficult to have a good night sleep. So try to eat a meal at no later than 3 or 4 hours before bedtime.

Try drinking herbal tea. Make yourself a hot cup of Chamomile tea to help calm your nervous system before bed. Herbal teas do not contain caffeine and are safe to drink before bed without the risk of stimulating the nervous system.

Eat a Balance Diet. Balance your meals throughout the day. Do not skip breakfast or lunch as this can throw off your hormone balance, which needs sleep. These meals should include protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats, all of which supply the body with the vitamins and minerals that are necessary for better sleep. A diet high in vitamin B, zinc and magnesium, all of which can be found in whole grain foods, may help your sleep cycle.

Get off your phone, tablet or computer about an hour before bed. It is not related to food, but the blue light this is emitted from these devices change your melatonin levels, the sleep-inducing hormone. This can make it harder for you to fall asleep; therefore you sleep less and have a lower quality of sleep. This can lead to increased hunger the next day and weight gain in the long term. Try reading the newspaper, a book or a magazine while sipping your chamomile tea.

Incorporating these dietary tips should improve the quality of your sleep and overall health.

Source: Rutgers Cooperative Extension