

## Having Trouble Falling Asleep? - A Daunting Task

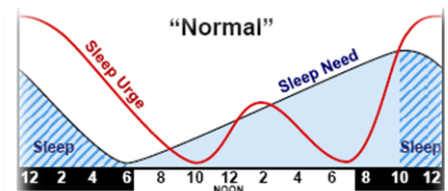
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July 25, 2011

Some nights, sleep can be a daunting task. Night after night, we have millions of thoughts racing through our head that we end up lying in bed agitated, frustrated, and stumped as to why the temperature isn't just right, the position is a little off, or why our brain just won't stop revving. Although the stimuli that our brain receives throughout the day is usually constant every day, some days, the food we eat, the mood we are in, and the environmental stimuli can contribute to the quality and quantity of sleep our body receives. Although we usually point to these specific instances, often it is a small change in daily routine that can cure your sleeping difficulties and give you the energy you need to stay mentally sharp throughout the day. In this article, I will be investigating the best way to get a good night's sleep and the food that can contribute to providing your body with natural, healthy, and effective sleep-inducing substances.

### Matching Your Circadian Rhythm

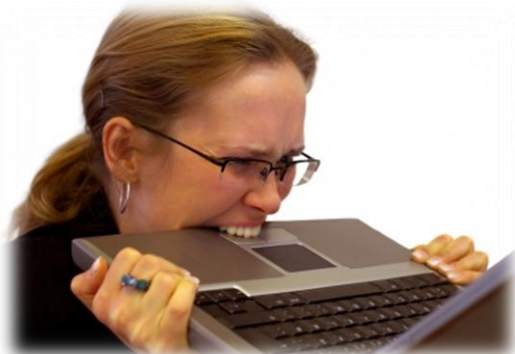
The key to getting a good night sleep is experimenting with the times you get to bed and how many hours you can get. By creating a consistent cycle, you can optimize your sleep by matching your natural sleep-wake cycle, your circadian rhythm. By matching this, you would be able to sleep the same amount of hours as you would any other day but feel much more refreshed and full of energy. By making your cycle consistent, going to sleep and waking up at the same time, you can make your body want to rest at a specific time, making you sleepy.



Normal circadian sleep rhythm. Sleep urge is greatest at night with a small increase at mid day. Sleep need increases throughout the waking hours and is replenished during sleep.

### Adjusting Your Environment

Sometimes, it's not you, but the environment that keeps you from getting your sleep. Having a noisy roommate or keeping the television or music on while sleeping can interrupt your sleep and cause you to wake up tired in the morning. Having a bed that doesn't suit your body can also result in interrupted sleep and make you wake up to an aching back or neck. Another factor in getting sleep is getting the temperature right. In most cases, you should have a cold environment rather than a hot one, for a couple of reasons. When you are cold, you can easily snuggle up to a loved one or wrap yourself in one or more blankets. When you are hot, it's a little harder cooling off and getting sleep. Sweat and heat are not your best friends when trying to sleep. Try not to wear socks, open the window a little bit, and keep the AC/fan on. Getting a routine going and seeing what works and what doesn't will be the best way you can fight off the insomniac inside of you.



### Don't Bring Work to Your Bed

Associating the bed with times of stress or work can cause you to be unable to wind down when you want to. The constant worrying or stress can cause you to have racing thoughts that you can't seem to control. By managing this stress and recognizing the cause of the stress, you should deal with it either with coping mechanisms or calming activities such as deep breathing, meditation, or yoga. These activities have been proven to ease your mind and get you to a more peaceful state of mind before falling asleep.

## Exercise and Eating Healthy

One component of effective sleep that is not recognized as much is exercise. By getting a workout in the morning you may think that you are just making yourself tired, but in actuality, you would see that a repetitive cycle of exercise in the morning will give you much more energy throughout the day and a satisfying night of sleep. The foods to watch out for before you attempt to sleep are foods high in fat, acid, or spice. As an Indian, I know too well that spicy food makes you burn inside, and can make it difficult to find sleep fast. Foods high in fat take a while to be absorbed. It may help you to fall asleep faster because the blood travels to your digestive



system, but the fatty foods you eat right before going to sleep are also the cause of excessive fat storage in the body. You should avoid drinks when trying to sleep because of the urinary trips you may have to take in the middle of the night. Specific drinks you should avoid are caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine, just like nicotine in cigarettes, is a stimulant and will keep you up. Alcohol, a depressant, will allow you to fall asleep faster, but you will wake up often throughout the night and possibly even only after a few hours of sleep, wasting the entire next day due to fatigue.

### Foods You Should Avoid Before Trying to Sleep

High protein foods without carbohydrates can keep you awake since the protein-containing foods also contain the amino acid tyrosine which stimulates the brain. Avoiding high-caffeine or stimulant drinks or foods will also help you find sleep faster as soda, coffee, tea, oranges, and pineapples can keep you awake.

### Foods You Should Eat Before Sleep

Light snacks rich in tryptophan and carbohydrates are effective in achieving a peaceful state of mind prior to sleep. Tryptophan is the amino acid that is the basis of the formation of the sleep-inducers, serotonin and melatonin. Foods high in carbohydrates can allow for the release of insulin, clearing your blood of amino acids competing with tryptophan. In addition, combining tryptophan-foods with carbohydrates and calcium can help the brain to make melatonin. Thus, the sleep-inducing foods that may help you sleep when consumed in a small quantity one hour before bedtime are: Turkey, Peanut Butter, Granola, Whole-Grain cereals, bananas, dairy-products, soy-products, meats, beans, lentils, watermelon, eggs, nuts, hummus, rice, potatoes, honey, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, and ground sunflower seeds. Other popular nighttime snacks are apple pie with ice cream and oatmeal raisin cookies with milk.

### Closing Remarks

Trying to find sleep at night isn't always easy for me, but there are a few tactics I use to knock me out. Occasionally, I will read a book, watch some TV, stretch to relax my muscles, crack my back to release stress, or even take a hot bath. By changing the small things in your daily routine, you can find the combination of activities or foods that can get you to sleep well and make the most of your next day.

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### References:

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