

Remedies for Insomnia: The Science Behind Sleep-Inducing Foods

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February 26, 2014 (FPRC) -- The type of foods we eat in the evening can have a pronounced effect on the quality of our sleep. One of the keys to a restful night's sleep is to calm and relax the brain, rather than stimulating it. Certain foods are a natural insomnia remedy that contributes to restful sleep, while others keep us alert and awake.

The calming foods contain the amino acid tryptophan, which is a precursor to the sleep-inducing substances serotonin and melatonin. Two recent studies confirm that eating more carbohydrates than protein increases tryptophan production, while eating a higher protein ratio increases tyrosine – an amino acid related to a stimulated, alert frame of mind.

One key study, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, is titled “High-Glycemic-Index Carbohydrate Meals Shorten Sleep Onset”. The glycemic index measures the effect of different types of carbohydrates on blood sugar levels. Researchers at the University of Sydney Australia gave two different kinds of meals to the study participants, a few hours before bedtime. They found that a carbohydrate-based, high glycemic index meal resulted in a significant shortening of the time needed to fall asleep, compared with a low glycemic meal.

In another study done at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, scientists honed in on specific measurements of tryptophan vs. tyrosine in the brain, based on whether carbohydrates or proteins were eaten at breakfast. Blood samples were collected after the meals, and the researchers concluded that a carbohydrate-rich diet raises tryptophan levels, while high-protein foods depress it.

For those who need to stay alert and sharp during the day, 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 healthy carbohydrates, with a small amount of protein that contains just enough tryptophan to relax the brain.

According to William Sears, M.D., “The best bedtime snack is one that has both complex carbohydrates and protein, and perhaps some calcium. Calcium helps the brain use the tryptophan to manufacture melatonin. This explains why dairy products, which contain both tryptophan and calcium, are one of the top sleep-inducing foods.”

Dr. Sears recommends that foods high in carbohydrates and calcium, and medium-to-low in protein, make the most ideal sleep-inducing bedtime snacks. Some examples are whole-grain cereal with milk, hazelnuts and organic tofu, oatmeal and raisin cookies with a glass of almond or regular milk, or a peanut butter or almond butter sandwich with or without ground sesame seeds.

Sesame seeds are rich in tryptophan. Other foods that are high in tryptophan, which can be combined with healthy carbohydrates to become natural sleep remedies, are whole grains, lentils, chickpeas, beans, eggs, sunflower seeds, and miso. As always, it's best to stay away from caffeine, sodas and nicotine in the evening.

The well-known nutritionist Adelle Davis writes about the roles of calcium for sleep in her book "Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit". She discusses a natural insomnia remedy and says: "A calcium deficiency often shows itself by insomnia, another form of an inability to relax. The harm done by sleeping tablets, to say nothing of the thousands of dollars spent on them, could largely be avoided if the calcium intake were adequate."

Natural sleep remedies containing highly absorbable, quick acting forms of calcium and magnesium, such as Sleep Minerals II from Nutrition Breakthroughs, can be helpful with both falling asleep and staying asleep during the night. This natural sleep remedy contains highly absorbable forms of calcium, magnesium and vitamin D - all combined in a softgel with carrier oils. Oils have been shown to increase mineral absorption and increase bone strength.

Richard P. of Parkville, Maryland says: "The Sleep Minerals are making quite a difference. I was regularly waking up at around 3:00 a.m. and after a few days use my sleep improved quite a lot. I wake up once a night to go to the bathroom, but the great thing is, I then fall back asleep and sleep several more hours. This has been a great improvement."

In conclusion, bedtime snacks and dinners that are high in carbohydrates, low-to-medium in protein, and contain calcium, will help you relax in the evening and set you up for a good night's sleep. An effective natural sleep remedy such as Sleep Minerals II can also be taken before sleep in order to increase the quality and quantity of sleep.

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