

SLEEP HABITS TO FALL INTO THIS YEAR

Contributed by Mandy Enright, MS, RDN, RYT

September is the perfect time to re-evaluate habits and reset both professional and personal goals. As summer winds down and we transition to the fall routine, it's a great time to assess our self-care habits. While nutrition and exercise habits may take top priority, sleep is one area that's often neglected. Establishing good habits around sleep and bedtime can significantly improve not only the quality of your sleep, but also your energy and overall health at the same time. It's true – you can get healthier in your sleep!

Why You Need Sleep

We spend almost one-third of our lifetime sleeping, underscoring the importance of quality daily sleep. Poor sleep has been linked to chronic disease and negative mental health, and can even shorten our lifespan. Ideally, you should aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night and be consistent with sleep habits. That means going to bed and waking up around the same times daily – including weekends.

Unplug to Recharge

Constant stimulation causes stress on the body, leading to inflammation, digestive issues, and anxiety. It also makes getting a good night's sleep a lot harder. If you find that you're both wired *and* tired at bedtime, here are some ways to unwind at the end of the day:

Set boundaries – and stick to them! Set a cut-off on your day when you are no longer available by text, email, or phone. Let others know that you will get back to them after a certain time the next day. When you respect your own time, others will too.

Have an Electronics Curfew: Establish a time to stop using electronic devices for the remainder of the night. Emails and social media can cause added stress and anxiety – not what you want before bedtime.

Limit Screen Time: Blue lights from screens on devices cause brain stimulation, making it harder to fall asleep. Stop using devices at least one hour before bedtime. Keep your phone out of reach of your bed, turn off notifications, and silence your phone to reduce temptation to check in the middle of the night.

Foods to Put You in a Sleepy Mood

Certain foods help produce and release hormones that make us feel sleepy:

- *Tryptophan* = amino acid that helps produce sleep hormones *serotonin* and *melatonin*
- *Serotonin* = hormone that causes sleepiness
- *Melatonin* = hormone that promotes deep, restful sleep

Protein-rich foods are high in tryptophan, while carbs are needed to unlock tryptophan. Enjoying these foods at dinner and before bedtime can help bring on that sleepy feeling:

- **Tryptophan-rich foods:** dairy, poultry, seafood, beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds
- **Natural sources of Melatonin:** nuts, leafy greens, tart cherry juice
- **Serotonin-Boosters:** kiwi, pineapple, fatty fish
- **Starchy Carbs:** cereal, rice, oatmeal
- **Caffeine-Free Drinks:** chamomile tea or warm milk





Foods to Avoid Before Bedtime

Avoid these foods late in the day as they can cause discomfort or alertness at bedtime:

- Caffeine
- Sugary foods
- High-sodium foods
- Spicy foods
- Large, high-fat meals

Restful & Relaxing Activities

Find a few activities that can take you away from daily obligations and help get the mind and body relaxed and ready for a good night's sleep:

- Meditation and breathing exercises (check out apps like Calm or Headspace)
- Yoga or light stretching
- Listen to calming music
- Take a warm shower or bath
- Aromatherapy
- Journaling
- Read a book or magazine

And a few DON'Ts to consider avoiding late in the day or right before bed:

- Bring your laptop, cell phone, or tablet to bed with you.
- Be available and responsive 24 hours to people outside your home or family.
- Check email or social media right before bed.
- Procrastinate to do your most stressful or intense work at the end of the day.
- Read books, magazines, or articles on electronic devices before bed.
- Do strenuous or vigorous workouts late in the day or right before bed.
- Be dehydrated – drink water throughout the day.
- Go to bed angry or upset – have an outlet like journaling or talking to someone.

RECIPE CORNER: CHERRY VANILLA SLEEPYTIME SMOOTHIE

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup lowfat or nonfat milk (or nondairy alternative)
- ¾ cup frozen cherries (or mixed berry blend with cherries)
- ¼ cup plain Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons rolled oats
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseeds
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup tart cherry juice

PREPARATION:

Place all ingredients listed in order into a blender and combine to desired consistency. Enjoy!



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