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HOW TO SLEEP WELL

You can sleep your way to good health, says nutritionist **Patrick Holford**

GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP doesn't just make you feel good; it's vital for your health. A study of more than 10,000 people in Britain conducted by the University of Warwick and University College, London found that, compared to those who sleep for seven hours a night, those who sleep for just five hours double their risk of fatal cardiovascular disease. Having too much sleep isn't good either. Mortality rates are higher for people who sleep for more than eight hours. Seven hours of uninterrupted sleep is ideal.

Dietary and lifestyle changes can make a huge difference to those suffering from insomnia. Along with stress and stimulants such as caffeine, sugar is the substance most likely to be keeping you awake. A good night's sleep begins with a low-GL diet. Cut back on sugar, refined foods and carbohydrates, including very sweet fruits and fruit juices.

Caffeine can keep you awake not only because it is a stimulant, but because it depresses the sleep hormone melatonin for up to 10 hours. It's sensible to avoid it in the afternoon if you're having trouble sleeping. Alcohol is relaxing at first, but its after-effects cause anxiety. It would be better to avoid alcohol, rather than depend on it to get you to sleep.

Towards the end of the day, serotonin levels rise and adrenalin levels fall. As it gets darker another neurotransmitter, melatonin, kicks in.

Melatonin regulates the sleep/wake cycle. Both serotonin and melatonin are made from the amino acid tryptophan. To support your brain's ability to convert tryptophan, take a high-potency multivitamin that contains at least 200mcg of folic acid, 20mg of vitamin B6, 10mg of zinc and 100mg of vitamin C.

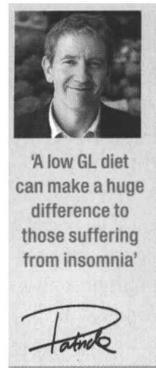
Calcium and magnesium work together to calm the body and relax nerves and muscles. A deficiency can trigger sleep difficulties. A small handful of pumpkin seeds or almonds provides both these crucial minerals. In addition, make sure you are eating plenty of magnesium-rich foods such as green vegetables, wholegrains, seeds, nuts and seafood. Some people find it helpful to take a supplement of 500mg of calcium and 300mg of magnesium in the evening.

Used for centuries to aid sleep, the herbal sedative valerian is the subject of numerous modern studies. It's powerful enough that you shouldn't mix it with alcohol or other drugs. A sensible dosage is 150 to 300mg, 45 minutes before bed.

For more information read *Food Is Better Medicine Than Drugs* by Patrick Holford and Jerome Burne (£16.99, Piatkus).

Your perfect deep-sleep environment

- **The bedroom is for sleeping (and making love) only. It's not an office or TV room.**
- **Minimise electro-magnetic radiation. Turn off your mobile phone, and keep cordless phone base stations well away from the bedroom.**
- **Play quiet, calming music to slow down brain activity as you go to bed. Try *Silence Of Peace* by John Levine, £14.99 (www.patrickholford.com).**
- **Keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature, and in complete darkness.**
- **If you have a bedside light, try a blue lampshade or a blue-toned bulb to help you relax.**
- **Lavender essential oil promotes sleep. Put a few drops in a warm bath each night to slow your system down.**



Nutrition | FIVE SENSES

