

## The Science of Sleepy Food

The things we eat and drink can have an impact on our sleep quality and affect our sleep patterns. As food contains different nutrients and chemicals, we can try to include options in our diet that may promote better sleep.



### Tuck yourself in with Tryptophan

Tryptophan is an amino acid found naturally in some food that's believed to induce sleep. This is because it is a precursor to the sleep-inducing chemicals, serotonin and melatonin, in the brain.

We can find Tryptophan in small amounts in most protein-rich foods and in higher amounts in **yoghurt, milk, oats, bananas, dates, poultry, eggs and peanuts.**

### Mellow Magnesium

Magnesium is a nutrient that is said to affect the neurons of the central nervous system, which could produce a calming effect that promotes sleep. It is also thought to relax muscles and promote 'deep' sleep.

We can find Magnesium in **leafy green vegetables, brown rice, unprocessed wheat bran, almond, cashew, pumpkin seed, sunflower seed.**

### B Vitamins

B Vitamins are naturally found in most diets and are considered important for sleep health, particularly as some B Vitamin deficiencies are known to cause insomnia. Good sources of B vitamins include **liver, kidney, beef, fish eggs, leafy vegetables, yeast, wheat flour, brown rice, oatmeal, legume, whole grains, nuts, seeds, seafood, and poultry.**

### Complex Carbohydrates

Complex carbohydrates are 'low-glycemic', which means they provide a more stable glucose level than low-carb options and are thought to be less likely to cause insomnia through glucose-fueled highs and sugar crashes. We can find complex carbohydrates in **brown rice, oatmeal and starchy vegetables, such as sweet**

## The truth about 'sleepy' drinks

### Warm milk

Milk contains the sleep-inducing amino acid tryptophan. Try pouring warm milk over cereal to get a tryptophan hit as the carbohydrates in cereal can help tryptophan to pass the blood-brain barrier. ✓

### Sleepy tea

Research shows chamomile increases the level of glycine (a nerve relaxant) in the body. Valerian tea was prescribed for insomnia in ancient Rome, and it may reduce the amount of time it takes to fall asleep and improve sleep quality, according to research. Passionflower has also been shown to improve sleep. ✓

It's believed valerian and passionflower increase the brain's level of gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA) – a chemical that helps us regulate our nerve cells and calms anxiety.



### Water

You can't get a good night's sleep if you wake up in the middle of the night because you're thirsty or need to go to the bathroom. Make sure you're drinking enough water during the day to stay hydrated all night. The European Food Safety Authority recommends we drink 6-8 200ml glasses of water (1.2 litres) of water daily, but we may need more on hot days during summer. ✓

### Oat and malt drinks

The malted milk drink Horlicks was invented in 1873, after the inventor saw his brother could easily fall back asleep after drinking it even after waking up in the middle of the night. Malted drinks, like 'Horlicks', contain tryptophan and magnesium so might contribute to a good nights sleep. ✓

### Hot chocolate

Hot chocolate is traditionally a bedtime drink. It usually contains caffeine, which is a stimulant, although amounts vary from brand to brand. If you find it difficult to get to sleep, consider switching to a sleepy tea or a malt-based drink. ✗

### Night cap

Alcohol might help us get to sleep, but causes us to spend less time in REM sleep (the most satisfying type of sleep) and can cause us to wake up during the night. ✗