

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Foods for Better Sleep”

Navigating which foods will actually help—or hinder—your sleep is a trickier path than it may first appear to be. Whether it’s due to their high caffeine content or difficulties with digestion, some foods will not only interfere with your ability to drift off but may even disrupt your sleep throughout the night. About 10% of men and 20% of women have chronic insomnia, meaning it occurs at least 3 times per week for at least 3 months. Meanwhile, 30% of US adults struggle with occasional or short-term bouts of insomnia. It’s a very prevalent problem. Certain foods and beverages can actually help you sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation. They include the following: **Cottage Cheese.** Because it’s high in lean protein, cottage cheese contains tryptophan, an amino acid known to increase serotonin levels. And it’s even better if you plop some raspberries on top, because they’re rich in melatonin. **Fruits.** In addition to raspberries, many fruits also contain melatonin, including tart cherries, bananas, pineapples, and oranges. **Whole Grains.** Surprisingly, popcorn, oatmeal, or whole-wheat crackers with some sort of nut butter are much better choices before bed than complex carbohydrates like white bread, pasta, or sugary, baked items, that only act to reduce your serotonin levels. **Nuts.** For a quick, pre-bedtime snack, nuts are a good option because they contain melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating sleep. **Warm Milk and Herbal Teas.** Some researchers have shown an association between milk’s tryptophan and melatonin content and better sleep. In addition, caffeine-free herbal teas like chamomile, valerian, or passionflower can be just plain relaxing. **Foods to Avoid Before Bed are as Follows:** Most people know that eating a big steak dinner, fried foods, or hot and spicy menu options too close to bedtime will interfere with their sleep. **Chocolate.** Unfortunately, it contains caffeine, which causes increased arousal and works to decrease your ability to fall into and sustain deeper sleep stages. Dark chocolate also contains small amounts of theobromine. Theobromine can increase heart rate and cause sleeplessness. **Matcha or Green Teas.** Green tea contains not only caffeine, but theobromine and theophylline, both of which can increase heart rate, cause feelings of nervousness, and increase overall anxiety. **Dried Fruit.** The high-fiber, low-water content of dried fruit can cause digestive issues, including gas and cramping during the night. The culprit is sorbitol. **Chips.** The sheer fat content of any chip should be a clear sign that you should stay away, especially before bedtime. **Oranges.** Because of their high acid content, oranges can cause or exacerbate heartburn, especially if they are eaten on an empty stomach.

In the America that I love, sleeping seven to eight hours per night is optimal for health.

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