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How to sleep: The 'disruptive' food habits to avoid - good sleep hygiene

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Length: 586 words

Byline: Harriet Whitehead

Highlight: THERE are many habits that can impact people's sleep, including dietary choices. Indeed, some experts say that good sleep hygiene includes making sure not to overeat before bed.

Body

Everyone needs different amounts of sleep. On average adults need seven to nine hours, while children need nine to 13 hours. Toddlers and babies need 12 to 17 hours of sleep, every day. The NHS Wrightington, Wigan, and Leigh Teaching Hospitals explains sleep is an essential part of life and contributes to us feeling well and happy. It states: "Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have a normal, quality night's sleep and increase daytime alertness."

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It explains: "Sleep hygiene is important for everyone, no matter their age, to promote healthy sleep and daytime alertness.

"Good sleep hygiene can also prevent the development of sleep disorders such as insomnia."

It advises people avoid going to bed hungry or too full, as "food can be disruptive right before bed".

Therefore, it suggests avoiding heavy meals before bedtime and also notes that hunger can also disturb sleep.

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Indeed, the Sleep Foundation says that overeating can affect sleep, and "eating too much, especially when it involves heavy or spicy foods, can worsen sleep by interfering with digestion and raising the risk of heartburn".

It states: "For this reason, most experts advise against eating too much and too close to bedtime."

The Sleep Charity explains that achieving a great night's sleep can be affected by what you eat in the hours before bedtime.

The charity says: "Certain foods are known to calm the brain and help promote sleep so eating the right things in the evening is definitely part of the recipe for a good night's kip."

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It adds that the charity does not recommend eating a big meal just before bedtime "as it can lead to discomfort and indigestion".

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People with insomnia will regularly find it hard to go to sleep, can wake up several times during the night and lie awake at night.

If you have insomnia for less than three months, it is called short-term insomnia. Insomnia that lasts three months or longer is called long-term insomnia.

For most, sleep problems tend to sort themselves out within about a month, according to the NHS.

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The Sleep Foundation notes: "Dietary choices affect more than just energy and sleepiness; they can play a major role in things like weight, cardiovascular health, and blood sugar levels just to name a few.

"For that reason, it's best to consult with a doctor or dietician before making significant changes to your daily diet.

"Doing so helps ensure that your food choices support not just your sleep but all of your other health priorities as well."

The organisation says: "Diet is also multifaceted. It isn't just one food; instead, it is cumulative, affected by when, what, and how much we eat throughout a day and over weeks, months, and years."

"Some people are naturally lighter sleepers or take longer to drop off, while some life circumstances might make it more likely for your sleep to be interrupted, like stressful events or having a new baby," the NHS states.

If poor sleep is affecting your daily life or causing you distress, you can talk to your GP.

The NHS says: "Most people experience problems with sleep in their life. In fact, it's thought that a third of Brits will have episodes of insomnia at some point."

People who smoke also tend to take longer to fall asleep, wake up more frequently, and often have more disrupted sleep.

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