

Sleeping Well the Night Before a Match

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One of the biggest factors in my ability to shoot well is how much and well I am able to sleep the night before. I have included this article because it may be of value to those, like myself, who sometimes have difficulty getting a good night's rest when there is a big match the next morning. -JD

Do you toss and turn during the night instead of sleeping soundly? If so, your battle with insomnia might start at the dining table, not in the bedroom. A cup of coffee or tea or a glass of cola are quick pick-me-ups that might undermine your sleep. Even small amounts of caffeine (like the amount in a chocolate doughnut) can affect your sleep, especially if you are sensitive to caffeine. Try eliminating all caffeine-containing beverages. If you feel and sleep better after two weeks of being caffeine-free, then avoid caffeine permanently. You can try adding back one or two cups after the two-week trial, but cut back if sleep problems reappear. As for alcohol, a nightcap might make you sleepy at first, but in the end you'll sleep less soundly and wake up more tired. Alcohol and other depressants suppress a phase of sleeping called REM (rapid eye movement) during which most of your dreaming occurs. Less REM is associated with more night awakenings and restless sleep. One glass of wine with dinner probably won't hurt, but avoid drinking any alcohol within two hours of bedtime. And never mix alcohol with sleeping pills!

Sleep-Friendly Table Tactics

Big dinners make you temporarily drowsy but prolong digestion, which interferes with a good night's sleep. It's best to eat your biggest meal before midafternoon and have a light evening meal of 500 calories or less. Include some chicken, extra-lean meat or fish at dinner to help curb middle-of-the-night snack attacks. Spicy foods can contribute to sleep problems: Dishes seasoned with garlic, chilies, cayenne or other hot spices can cause nagging heartburn or indigestion. Avoid spicy foods at dinner. Gas-forming foods and hurried eating also cause abdominal discomfort, which in turn interferes with sound sleep. Limit your intake of gas-forming foods to the morning hours, and thoroughly chew food to avoid gulping air.

Bedtime Snacks: Great Alternative to Sleeping Pills

A high-carbohydrate snack, such as crackers and fruit or toast and jam, triggers the release of a brain chemical called serotonin, which aids sleep. And although the traditional glass of warm milk, a protein-rich beverage, probably doesn't affect serotonin levels, the warm liquid soothes and relaxes you and makes you feel full, which might help facilitate sleep. A new product on the market called 5-Hydroxy-L-tryptophan, or 5-HTP, is touted as a building block for serotonin, which is a mood elevator, brain stimulant and sleep enhancer. However, since its safety is questionable and no optimal dose has been established, you're better off raising serotonin levels naturally with high-carbohydrate snacks.

Curbing the Midnight Snack Attack

Do you awaken in the middle of the night, unable to fall back to sleep unless you eat something? These midnight snack cravings may be triggered by hunger, or they may just be habit. In either case, your best bet is to break the cycle. Try eating more during the day, and stop rewarding your stomach by feeding it every time it wakes you up. Instead, read a book, drink a glass of water or ignore the craving. It takes up to two weeks to break a midnight snack habit.

Exercising to Relieve Stress

Stress is a common cause of insomnia. Often, relieving tensions and anxieties eliminates sleep problems. One tension reliever is exercise. In a study from Stanford University in Palo Alto, CA, healthy adults with mild sleep problems who exercised twice a week for at least 40 minutes per session fell asleep faster and slept about 45 minutes longer than people who didn't exercise. Physical activity also helps you cope with daily stress and tires the body so it is ready to sleep at night. Vigorous exercise should be done no closer to bedtime than six hours; mild exercise should be done no closer to bedtime than four hours. In short, sleeping pills are a temporary fix, but a few simple dietary and lifestyle changes could do wonders for your long-term snooze control.

Excerpted from *Doze Control: Eat Right and You'll Sleep Like a Baby*

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