Foods that make you sleep better

Sleep helps keep you happy, your brain sharp, your immune system strong, your skin looking youthful and lowers your risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. Read on to learn how eating the right foods can make you sleep better.

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Bernard Ongom suffered from insomnia so severe that it almost cost him his job. He says it all started when he got a promotion at work.

"When I was promoted from a sales executive to a branch manager of a major telecom company, the pressure became too much. The person I had replaced had been fired for incompetence and laxity and my boss expected me to turn things around," Ongom narrated.

He says he started staying up late in the night initially to complete pending projects and sometimes to hang out with his team as a bonding exercise.

"After months of this, I was finally on top of things and felt I could go back to sleeping normally but I could not. I would wake up at 2am every night and fail to sleep again until morning," he adds.

Ongom is not unique. A report from Sleep Disorders Centre at Mount Sinai Medical Centre in Miami Beach suggests that at least 30 per cent of the world's population has insomnia at some point in their lives. Insomnia can be caused by a number of factors, including anxiety, depression, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome and poor sleeping habits.

Dr George Bwesigye, a general physician from Najeera Hospital, says poor or lack of sleep is dangerous as it not only affects our health but worsens every chronic condition including depression, heart disease, high blood pressure and different types of cancer. But luckily there are a few things one can do to increase their quality of sleep such as exercise and diet.

Magnesium

Dr Bwesigye suggests regular intake of foods rich in magnesium for better sleep. These foods, including vegetables, bananas, avocados, beans, and nuts help muscles relax which induces sleep.

Calcium

Dr Doreen Kagezi, a nutrition expert, recommends milk and yoghurt which have sleep-inducing calcium that is effective in stress reduction and stabilisation of nerve fibres, including those in the brain.

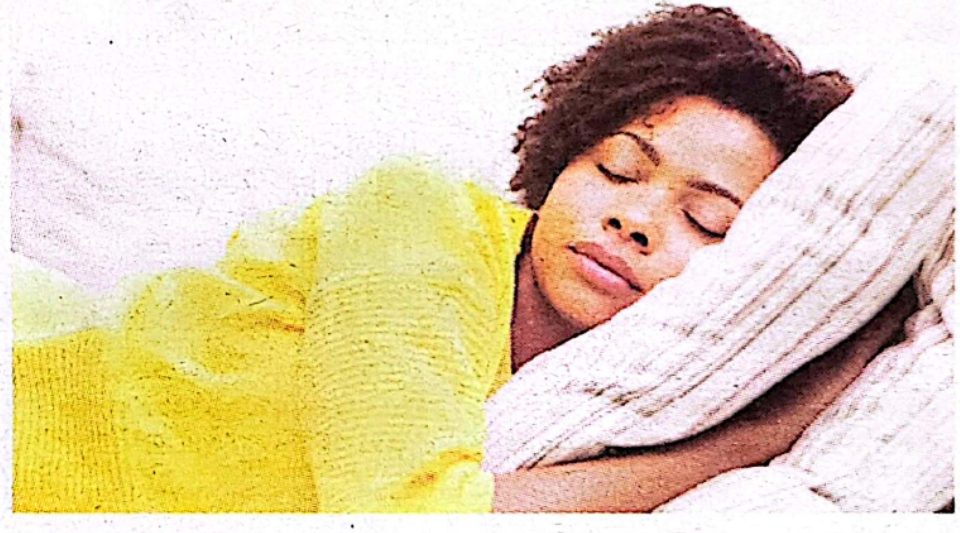
"Try taking milk with a sweet banana. Bananas are a good source of potassium and magnesium, which help to relax muscles. They also contain Vitamin B6, which may improve sleep," Dr Kagezi adds.

Tea

Dr Kagezi recommends drinking decaffeinated green teas especially chamomile tea which help calm the brain and reduce stress. "Other foods include Oatmeal and Whole-Grain cereals that are rich in magnesium, phosphorus, silicon, potassium, and other vitamins and minerals," she says.

According to Dr Bwesigye, boiled eggs, fish, such as salmon, tuna, cod and halibut have a plentiful supply of vitamin B6. This important vitamin is needed by the body to make melatonin. This is a hormone that is triggered in the body by darkness and it induces sleep. Eat more fish and your body will have the vitamin B6 it needs to make melatonin.

"For better sleep it advisable to eat appropriate portions at least three hours before bedtime because too little will cause hunger that will keep you awake while too much can lead to heart burn or acid reflux," he advises.



Rating your sleep

The quality of sleep can be hard to determine. Here are some guidelines to rate your sleep.

- When you go to bed, you should fall asleep in 30 minutes or less
- Good sleep does not mean you will not wake up in the night. Adults are actually expected to wake once or twice a night. When you do, you should be able to fall asleep within 20 minutes of going back to bed or less.

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