

Better Sleep, Happier You

How sleep connects with energy, digestion, appetite, stress and the body's inflammatory balance.

Sleep is active recovery

Sleep can look like the part of the day when nothing is happening, but the body is busy. Sleep supports memory, emotional regulation, immune function, metabolic health and physical recovery. When sleep is repeatedly short or disrupted, many people notice changes in concentration, appetite, mood, pain sensitivity and energy. Research also links insufficient or disturbed sleep with changes in inflammatory signalling, although sleep is only one part of a much larger health picture.

This is why a conversation about food and inflammation should include sleep. If you wake exhausted, rely on caffeine to keep going, skip meals because your appetite feels wrong and then eat late because the day has run away from you, it can be easy to blame individual foods for how you feel. Sometimes the wider rhythm of the day is contributing too.

Sleep and digestion

The digestive system and the nervous system constantly communicate. Stress, irregular routines and poor sleep can influence appetite, gastrointestinal symptoms and food choices. Reflux may also be more troublesome when someone eats a large meal close to lying down, although individual medical conditions need individual advice. Rather than creating strict rules, notice whether timing, portion size and your evening routine repeatedly affect comfort.

Sleep and appetite

Poor sleep can alter the way hunger and reward are experienced. After a difficult night, convenient high-energy foods may feel more appealing and planning or preparing meals can feel harder. That is not a lack of willpower. A tired brain has fewer resources available for decision-making. Making food easier on tired days can be more useful than demanding greater discipline.

Prepare for the tired version of you

Keep a few reliable foods available that require very little preparation. If sensory needs or ARFID limit your choices, prioritise safe foods and adequate intake. A prepared snack, familiar breakfast or ready-to-eat option can prevent a poor night's sleep becoming an entire day without enough nourishment.

Create a landing strip for sleep

A sleep routine does not need to be elaborate. Think of the final part of the evening as a landing strip rather than an instant switch. Lower stimulation where possible. Dim lights. Finish practical tasks. Put tomorrow's essentials somewhere visible. Choose a familiar calming activity. If your mind becomes busy in bed, writing down what needs remembering can reduce the pressure to hold everything mentally overnight.

For ADHD and autistic brains

Traditional sleep advice can miss the reality of neurodivergence. ADHD can make stopping an interesting activity extremely difficult, while autistic sensory needs can make temperature, bedding, noise, light and physical sensations impossible to ignore. The solution may therefore be practical rather than motivational: alarms that signal the start of winding down, predictable sequencing, comfortable sensory conditions, reduced decision-making and enough transition time.

Do not turn sleep into another performance

Trying very hard to sleep can make sleep feel like a test. If every bad night becomes evidence that tomorrow will be ruined, anxiety can increase arousal further. Aim for conditions that support rest rather than demanding a particular number of perfect hours. A difficult night can be met with a gentler following day, regular food, hydration, daylight and appropriate movement rather than punishment.

Your sleep check-in

What usually keeps me awake: thoughts, sensory discomfort, pain, reflux, screens, work, irregular timing or something else? What is one part of the evening I could make easier? Do I need a reminder to begin winding down? Is my bedroom comfortable for my sensory needs? Do I have easy food available for mornings after poor sleep? Is persistent sleep difficulty something I need to discuss with a healthcare professional?

A message from me

Sleep affects so much of how a day feels. When we are exhausted, ordinary things become harder: eating, remembering, regulating emotions, coping with noise, making decisions and being patient with ourselves. You do not need a perfect bedtime routine. Start by making the hour before sleep a little kinder to your brain and body, and make the morning after a difficult night kinder too.

Clinical note

Persistent insomnia, loud snoring with breathing pauses, significant daytime sleepiness, sudden sleep episodes, restless legs, ongoing pain or other concerning sleep symptoms should be discussed with an appropriate healthcare professional. This resource provides general educational information and is not a diagnosis or individual treatment plan.