

## Milk, carbohydrates or a late-night pudding: what's the secret to eating for a good night's sleep?

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- How much sleep do you usually get per night?
- When do you normally eat your main meal of the day? Do you eat it in the evening or at lunchtime?
- Do you ever have difficulty sleeping? If so, what do you do to help you fall asleep?

#### 2 Key words

a. Find these words and phrases in the article and write the correct words next to the definitions.

poor  
carbohydrates  
separate

factor  
impacts  
associated with

digesting  
well before  
snacking on

shift workers

1. people who work at night or outside normal working hours \_\_\_\_\_
2. a long time earlier than something else happens \_\_\_\_\_
3. eating small amounts of food (usually between meals) \_\_\_\_\_
4. connected with or related to something \_\_\_\_\_
5. not good; low in quality \_\_\_\_\_
6. affects; causes something (negative) to happen as a result \_\_\_\_\_
7. substances that are found in rice or pasta that give the body energy \_\_\_\_\_
8. breaking down food in your stomach and intestines \_\_\_\_\_
9. a thing that causes a result to happen \_\_\_\_\_
10. to consider two things as different \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. Athletes need to eat foods high in \_\_\_\_\_ before they compete to give them energy.
2. We arrived \_\_\_\_\_ the concert started to avoid the crowds.
3. You can't \_\_\_\_\_ diet and exercise from a healthy lifestyle.
4. Samira and Amber often feel tired because they are \_\_\_\_\_ at the hospital.
5. Stress is often \_\_\_\_\_ heart problems.
6. Our bodies usually have problems \_\_\_\_\_ large meals before bedtime.
7. Cost is an important \_\_\_\_\_ when people decide which car to buy.
8. The food at the hotel restaurant was of very \_\_\_\_\_ quality.
9. Try to avoid \_\_\_\_\_ crisps when you're watching TV.
10. The new rules will \_\_\_\_\_ how companies pay their workers.

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*Many of us suffer with bad sleep. Could changing what – and when – we eat improve our chances of sleeping well?*

**Bianca Nogrady**  
**16 August, 2025**

- 1 Ask the internet for advice on how to eat for a good night's sleep and you could lose a whole night trying to find a clear answer. However, dietary habits seem to be an important factor that can make the difference between a good sleep and a bad one.
- 2 Some of the most useful information on sleep comes from studies of those people who work at night. At CQ University in Adelaide, research psychologist Dr Charlotte Gupta has been studying how different eating habits affect shift workers' performance. Her most important piece of advice for a good night's sleep is to eat well before bedtime.
- 3 "We're not meant to be digesting food at night," Gupta says. When we eat a meal too close to sleep, the body has to focus on digestion, when it should be resting. "So, we're more likely to wake up during the night, remember our dreams, not get that really good sleep," she says. The ideal is to eat your last food at least two hours before going to sleep, which means no snacking on food from the fridge.
- 4 The size of that final meal can also make a difference. Ideally, we should be having a bigger meal in the middle of the day and a smaller meal in the evening. But not too small. "We don't want it to be so small for dinner that you feel really hungry during the night, that your body's going to wake you up and want food," Gupta says.
- 5 On the question of what to eat for a good night's sleep, the answer is less clear, says nutritionist Dr Elizabeth Machan from the University of Sydney. "We haven't got any research that has given us the perfect recipe for what the evening meal should be," she says. There's some evidence that high-fat meals are more filling, so in theory people will have more restful sleep, Machan says. But diets high in fat are also associated with shorter sleep.
- 6 In the same way, despite the popular idea that eating carbs before bedtime is bad, some studies suggest having a meal high in carbohydrates can actually help people get to sleep faster. "I think a lot of people avoid carbs in the evening, and that's why they want to eat later in the night," she says.
- 7 Machan says it's important to include vegetables in that evening meal to help slow digestion. "So if you've got a meal that is lower energy, you're not going to wake up in the middle of the night hungry."
- 8 One of the challenges with understanding the connection between diet and sleep is that it's not easy to separate the two. Studies connecting late meal times with poor sleep are not measuring sleep on one night, but over the past month. "I think what it's telling us is that people who don't sleep well are more likely to eat later in the evening," says Dr Jen Walsh, director of the Centre for Sleep Science at the University of Western Australia.
- 9 One way of looking at it is that eating later means less sleep, but it's also possible that people who don't sleep well eat later. "It's possible that people who eat later have poor health in general," she says.
- 10 Like so many other health stories, good sleep seems to be about a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle. "I say that sleep impacts diet and it also impacts exercise, so really we need to get the sleep right, and it will get everything else right," Walsh says.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and choose the correct answer (a, b or c) according to the information in the article.

1. According to Dr Charlotte Gupta, what is the main problem with eating close to bedtime?
  - a. We tend to eat larger meals in the evening.
  - b. Our body focuses on digestion instead of resting.
  - c. The food we eat at night contains too much fat.
2. What does Dr Gupta recommend about the timing and size of evening meals?
  - a. Eat a very small dinner at least three hours before sleep.
  - b. Have your largest meal in the evening, two hours before bed.
  - c. Eat a medium-sized dinner at least two hours before sleep.
3. What does nutritionist Dr Elizabeth Machan say about the ideal evening meal?
  - a. Research has given us a perfect recipe for evening meals.
  - b. High-fat meals definitely lead to better sleep.
  - c. There is no clear scientific evidence about what to eat.
4. According to the article, what effect might carbohydrates have on sleep?
  - a. They can make it harder to fall asleep.
  - b. They may actually help people fall asleep faster.
  - c. They should never be eaten in the evening.
5. What does Dr Jen Walsh suggest about the relationship between diet and sleep?
  - a. The connection between the two is difficult to understand.
  - b. Eating late causes poor sleep.
  - c. Healthy people almost always eat early.

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6. What is the main conclusion about getting a good sleep?
  - a. It depends only on when you eat your evening meal.
  - b. It's mainly about avoiding carbohydrates at night.
  - c. It's connected to having a healthy diet and lifestyle in general.

#### 4 Key language

**a. Find forms of these words as they appear in the article.**

1. fill \_\_\_\_\_
2. diet \_\_\_\_\_
3. rest \_\_\_\_\_
4. ideal \_\_\_\_\_
5. nutrition \_\_\_\_\_

**b. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the words from the previous activity.**

1. My \_\_\_\_\_ advised me to avoid carbohydrates before bedtime.
2. Eight hours of sleep per night is the \_\_\_\_\_ amount for most people.
3. Many people believe that changing your \_\_\_\_\_ can improve your sleep.
4. Eating a dish such as lasagne is usually more \_\_\_\_\_ than eating a salad.
5. After a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ night's sleep, you should wake up feeling energised.

#### 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these questions.**

- What other factors do you think can affect the eating habits and sleep quality of young people?
- Think about your own eating and sleeping habits. Do you follow any of the advice mentioned in the article? What changes could you make to your evening routine based on what you've learned?

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#### 6 In your own words

- a. **Imagine that you work for a health food company that wants to create a new product for students. Your marketing team has identified a gap in the market: there's no snack designed for students that helps them sleep better.**
  - Design the perfect late-night snack based on the research in the article.
  - Consider the ingredients, portion size and packaging.
  - Think about: What would it contain? How big would it be? When should students eat it?
  - Create a brief product description explaining why your snack follows the research guidelines.
- b. **Present your snack design to the class as if you're selling the idea to company executives. Then vote on the snack you would most likely buy.**