

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

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- How much sleep do you typically get per night?
- When do you normally eat your main meal of the day? Do you generally 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.

emerging	carbs	sceptical	intake	pecking at
absorbing	clearcut	exposed to	light exposure	primed
convert	amid	nutrients	gut	two-way street
boost	duration	insights	old chestnut	well before

1. eating small amounts of food slowly without finishing it \_\_\_\_\_
2. a situation where two people or groups both need to give and receive \_\_\_\_\_
3. knowledge of something that helps you understand it more clearly \_\_\_\_\_
4. substances in food that your body needs to stay healthy \_\_\_\_\_
5. the amount of food and drink that you put into your body \_\_\_\_\_
6. prepared and ready for something \_\_\_\_\_
7. easy to understand; obvious \_\_\_\_\_
8. your stomach or the part of the body that digests food \_\_\_\_\_
9. to change something into a different form or use \_\_\_\_\_
10. in the middle of; surrounded by things or people \_\_\_\_\_
11. be doubtful that something is true or useful \_\_\_\_\_

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### Level 3: Advanced

12. substances found in foods like bread, rice and pasta (short form of the word carbohydrates)  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. a long time earlier than something else happens \_\_\_\_\_
14. starting to become known or important \_\_\_\_\_
15. enjoyable and interesting so you want to keep paying attention \_\_\_\_\_
16. natural or artificial sunlight and the amount of time you spend in it \_\_\_\_\_
17. the length of time something continues \_\_\_\_\_
18. to increase or improve something \_\_\_\_\_
19. a story, idea or question that people repeat often, even if it's old or not useful anymore  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. able to be easily harmed or negatively affected by something \_\_\_\_\_

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

1. Many scientists remain \_\_\_\_\_ about the authenticity of the images of UFOs.
2. The report highlighted several \_\_\_\_\_ markets that could reshape global trade.
3. Erin sat distractedly \_\_\_\_\_ her lunch while scrolling through her emails.
4. The issue isn't as \_\_\_\_\_ as it first appears; there are moral and legal implications.
5. We arrived \_\_\_\_\_ the concert started to avoid the rush for seats.
6. The documentary was so \_\_\_\_\_ that I completely lost track of time.
7. Reducing your daily sugar \_\_\_\_\_ can significantly improve your energy levels.
8. Tim loosened his belt to relieve the pain in his \_\_\_\_\_ after eating such an enormous meal.

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### Level 3: Advanced

9. The athletics team was \_\_\_\_\_ for success after months of rigorous training.
10. Prolonged \_\_\_\_\_ from one's phone screen late at night can disrupt natural sleep cycles.
11. I wonder whether there's some truth to the \_\_\_\_\_ that your childhood is 'the happiest time of your life'.
12. A group of young entrepreneurs decided to \_\_\_\_\_ the warehouse into a co-working space.
13. Endurance athletes often increase the amount of \_\_\_\_\_ they eat before a marathon to give them extra energy.
14. A short walk in fresh air can provide a surprising \_\_\_\_\_ to your mood.
15. Dark green vegetables are packed with essential \_\_\_\_\_ for the body.
16. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the flight was longer than expected due to strong headwinds.
17. Tourists were \_\_\_\_\_ extreme heat during the camel trek across the desert.
18. The novel offers profound \_\_\_\_\_ into the human condition.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ the noise and confusion, Lucy managed to keep her composure.
20. Trust in any workplace situation is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_; it must be given and earned.

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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**

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- 1 Have a glass of warm milk. No, a cup of herbal tea. Eat carbs, but only the right carbs. Have fats, but not too much. Have a filling meal. No, not that filling. Eat early, but not too early or you'll get hungry again later.
- 2 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. But amid a global shortage of good sleep (48% of Australian adults report having at least two sleep-related problems), dietary habits are emerging as an important factor that can make the difference between refreshing rest and a night spent regretting every food choice you made in the previous 24 hours.
- 3 Some of the most useful insights into the effect of timing, size and quality of meals on sleep come from studies of those who work through the night to keep our world running. At CQ University in Adelaide, research psychologist Dr Charlotte Gupta has been studying how different eating patterns affect shift workers' performance. Her most important piece of advice for a good night's sleep is to eat well before bedtime.
- 4 "We're not primed to be digesting food at night," Gupta says. A meal eaten too close to sleep forces the body to focus energy and resources on digestion, when it should be resting and performing other tasks that take place while we rest. "So it's likely to impact the quality of our sleep; we're more likely to wake up during the night, remember our dreams, not get that really restorative sleep," she says.
- 5 The ideal is to eat your last food at least two hours before going to sleep, which means no pre-sleep pecking at leftovers or midnight raid of the fridge for a spoonful of cold pudding.
- 6 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, when light exposure means our body is very much awake and primed for digestion, 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.
- 7 On the question of what to eat for a good night's sleep, the answer is less clearcut, says exercise physiologist and nutritionist Dr Elizabeth Machan from the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and the University of Sydney. "We haven't got extensive research that has given us the perfect recipe for what the evening meal should be," she says.
- 8 There's some evidence that higher-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 duration.
- 9 Similarly, despite the popular idea that eating carbs before bedtime is bad, some studies suggest having a meal higher in carbohydrate can actually help people get to sleep faster. "I think a lot of people might avoid carbs in the evening, for instance, or they'll reduce their carb intake in the evening, and that's when they can become more food-seeking later in the night as a result," she says.
- 10 Machan says it's important to include vegetables in that evening meal to help slow the digestive process. "Your gut's going to be exposed to those nutrients for longer, it'll have a better chance of absorbing them," she says. "So if you've got a meal that is lower energy, for instance, it's going to keep you full, you're not going to wake up in the middle of the night hungry."
- 11 There's a lot of interest in micronutrients such as the amino acid tryptophan, which the body can convert into the sleep hormone melatonin, and which is found in a range of foods including eggs, tofu, salmon, milk, turkey and some nuts and seeds.
- 12 While some studies suggest increasing tryptophan intake might boost melatonin and improve sleep quality, Machan is more sceptical, arguing that light exposure is much more important in regulating melatonin. "You're not going to make [melatonin] if you're sitting in light – it's a signal that we're not needing to go to sleep, that it's daytime," she says.
- 13 One of the challenges with exploring the link between diet and sleep is that it's a two-way street, says Dr Jen Walsh, director of the Centre for Sleep Science at the University of Western Australia.
- 14 Studies connecting late meal times with poor sleep are measuring not necessarily sleep quality on one night, but over the past month. "I think what it's telling us is that individuals who have poorer sleep are more likely to eat later in the evening."

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### Level 3: Advanced

- 15 While one way of looking at it is that eating later means poorer-quality sleep, another way of interpreting the data is that people who have poorer-quality sleep are more likely to eat later. "It's potentially [the case] that people who eat later have worse health behaviours in general," she says.
- 16 Like so many other health stories, good sleep ultimately seems to come back to that same old chestnut of healthy diet, healthy lifestyle. "I say that sleep impacts diet and it also impacts exercise, so really we need to be getting the sleep right, and it will get everything else right," Walsh says.

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### Level 3: Advanced

#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and choose the correct answer (a, b, c or d).

1. What does the opening paragraph suggest about advice on eating for better sleep?
  - a. It is consistently reliable across different sources.
  - b. Internet sources generally provide more accurate guidance than experts.
  - c. Most recommendations focus primarily on the timing of meals.
  - d. The abundance of conflicting information can be overwhelming.
2. According to Dr Charlotte Gupta, eating close to bedtime is problematic because ...
  - a. the body's digestive system becomes less efficient at night.
  - b. it prevents the body from carrying out essential nighttime functions.
  - c. people tend to choose unhealthy foods when eating late.
  - d. the stomach produces less acid during evening hours.
3. What does Dr Gupta recommend regarding the timing and size of evening meals?
  - a. Eat the largest meal of the day at least two hours before sleep.
  - b. Have a substantial dinner but avoid any food for three hours before bed.
  - c. Consume a moderate evening meal, and eat it at least two hours before sleep.
  - d. Skip dinner entirely if you've had a large lunch.
4. Dr Elizabeth Machan's position on the relationship between fat intake and sleep is that ...
  - a. high-fat meals definitely improve sleep quality.
  - b. fat content is irrelevant to sleep quality.
  - c. people should avoid all fats in their evening meals.
  - d. the research presents contradictory findings about fat and sleep.

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### Level 3: Advanced

5. Dr Machan recommends including vegetables in evening meals primarily to ...
  - a. provide essential vitamins and minerals for sleep.
  - b. reduce the overall caloric content of the meal.
  - c. slow down the digestive process and help you feel full for longer.
  - d. balance the ratio of carbohydrates to proteins.
6. According to Dr Jen Walsh, research linking late eating with poor sleep ...
  - a. may reflect broader lifestyle patterns rather than a causal relationship.
  - b. demonstrates a clear cause-and-effect relationship.
  - c. proves that eating late directly causes sleep problems.
  - d. is based on short-term studies that lack reliability.

### 4 Key language

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

1. spoon \_\_\_\_\_
2. restore \_\_\_\_\_
3. diet \_\_\_\_\_
4. rest \_\_\_\_\_
5. short \_\_\_\_\_
6. herb \_\_\_\_\_

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

1. My nutritionist recommended drinking a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ infusion to help with relaxation.
2. For people who are \_\_\_\_\_ of sleep, even simple tasks such as making decisions can be difficult.
3. Many people believe that changing your \_\_\_\_\_ can significantly improve your sleep quality.

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

### Level 3: Advanced

4. Deep sleep is essential to \_\_\_\_\_ the brain and body.
5. Add a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ of honey to warm milk to make a calming bedtime drink.
6. After a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ night's sleep, you should wake up feeling energised.

### 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these questions.**

- Some researchers argue that eating late affects sleep, while others suggest that poor sleep leads to late eating. Which view do you agree with? Why?
- The article mentions other factors that affect sleep, such as light exposure and lifestyle. Which factor affecting sleep do you think is the most overlooked among young people, and what practical strategies could address it?

### 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 specifically designed for students that promotes better sleep.**
- 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.**