

May 2020: Celebrating Mental Health Month

Trick to a Better Night's Sleep

Getting enough [sleep](#) is vital to a healthy lifestyle. It can keep your immune system strong, improve your mood, and help you feel less stressed. Yet 1 in 3 adults don't get the recommended amount of sleep.¹ And in uncertain times, it can be even more difficult to sleep well. If you're struggling to sleep through the night, one good first step is evaluating your diet. Certain foods can help you sleep better — and you may already have some of them in your kitchen. So, what can you eat during the day to set yourself up for a good night's rest?

Three Foods to Help with Sleep

1. **Nuts:** Not only are many nuts high in heart-healthy fat, but some also contain the hormone [melatonin](#),² which helps regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Nuts that contain high amounts of naturally occurring melatonin include pistachios, walnuts, and almonds. So, reach for a handful of nuts for an afternoon snack. Or consider adding pistachios to a [hearty kale and butternut squash salad](#).

2. **Fruits:** Another good-for-you option that can help you sleep well? Fruit. Bananas, kiwis, and fresh, frozen, or dried tart cherries are high on the list of melatonin-containing fruits.² But if you'd rather reach for fruit with less sugar, avocados are a good choice. In addition to being packed with vitamins and potassium, avocados also contain [magnesium](#) — a mineral that aids in many of your body's essential functions, like muscle relaxation and energy production. And some research shows a connection between magnesium intake and decreased anxiety and depression,³ which can affect how well you do — or don't — sleep. As a plus, avocados can make a simple snack, from the ever-popular avocado toast to [a healthy take on a chocolate pie](#).

3. **Tea:** For many people, sipping a cup of tea is a soothing way to end the day. And certain teas can help promote good sleep. [Chamomile](#), for example, is an herb often used in tea that is known to help with sleep. One study found that chamomile can significantly improve sleep quality in older people, in particular.⁴ And you can easily find many chamomile tea options in your local grocery store. Just remember: Whether you go for chamomile, peppermint, or



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antioxidant-rich green tea, choose one without caffeine. Of course, plenty of other foods contain melatonin and magnesium. To find others — and learn more about the nutritional breakdowns of your favorite foods — you can [search the U.S. Department of Agriculture's online database](#).

Tip: It is a good idea to avoid eating any food, especially heavy meals, too close to [bedtime](#). And in general, avoid caffeine at least 4 to 6 hours before you go to bed.

For individualized telephone wellness coaching call 1-866-251-4514

Topics include trying to get more active, eat better, manage your weight, quit tobacco, or handle stress, your personal coach can help you create—and stick with—a plan for reaching your goals. You and your coach talk one-on-one by phone convenient a time.

Reduce Your Stress by Creating a Calming Space at Home

Having a space you enjoy spending time in can help you relax, unwind, and unload stress. From colors and cutting clutter to sunlight and scent, here's how to refresh your home — even if it's just a small corner of it — to create a cozy spot as you stay safe at indoors.

Lighten Up: Research has shown that sunlight increases levels of the hormone serotonin, which makes us feel happier. "If you're not getting sunlight, you're going to feel more lethargic," says Amanda Bye, PsyD, a Kaiser Permanente behavioral medicine specialist.

When your time outside is limited, open curtains or rearrange furniture so your favorite chair is near a window.

Clear Away Clutter: When bills, dishes, and newspapers pile up, people feel a sense of unease. "That doesn't feel settling or restful for people," Bye says. A simple solution? [Cut out the clutter](#). "Pick 2 things you can do each day," she suggests. "You'll start allowing your mind and body to rest."

Add Color: If you have paint, adding a pop of color, like sunflower yellow or sky blue, can be an instant mood booster. Colors both soothe and stimulate us. "Lighter shades of blues and greens and neutral creams are calming. They feel good," Bye says. In fact, she cites a study that found pink walls reduced aggression. So, consider calming colors to set a kinder, gentler tone for your home. If you have art supplies, get creative by painting or drawing, or hang scarves as wall decor.

Seek Out Scent: One simple way to create a peaceful place? Fill your home with your favorite scents. Experiment with aromatherapy by using plant extracts to promote health and well-being. Let your nose guide you to the smells you find most relaxing and stimulating. "We recommend lavender when people have sleep problems. Grapefruit tends to be more energizing and awakening," says Bye, who adds that scents may hold the power to help manage moods.

Bring the Outside in: While you're sniffing around for good scents, don't forget that nature



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stimulates your senses, too. A rippling indoor water feature or an open window are all ways you can invite nature into your home. If you have a yard or garden, experiment with building arrangements of flowers or branches. “If you can’t get outside, bringing nature inside absolutely improves our mood,” Bye says.

In addition to changing your environment, you can work on being healthy and happy from the inside out by learning to lower your stress levels. If you need help, our online healthy lifestyle programs can help. Find out more at kp.org/healthylifestyles.

References

¹[“Sleep and Sleep Disorders,”](#) CDC, February 22, 2018.

²Xiao Meng et al., [“Dietary Sources and Bioactivities of Melatonin,”](#) *Nutrients*, April 2017.

³Anna E. Kirkland et al., [“The Role of Magnesium in Neurological Disorders,”](#) *Nutrients*, June 2018.

⁴M. Adib-Hajbaghery & SN Mousavi, [“The Effects of Chamomile Extract on Sleep Quality Among Elderly People: A Clinical Trial,”](#) *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, December 2017.



Call Kaiser San Francisco Health Education Department at (415) 833-3450 to register for online classes or e-mail to find out more: SFHealthEd@kp.org
Hours: Monday - Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

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Additional Resources

Need more help improving your sleep? We have you covered. From bedtime meditations to more tips for catching better z’s, check out our [online Sleeping better resource center](#). Health Education Department offers “Improving Your Sleep” and “Managing Your Stress” classes at no cost to members. Please call KPSF Health Education Department at (415) 833-3450 to register for classes.

Mindfulness & Stress. Practicing mindfulness means being fully present in the moment. The goal is to be aware of your thoughts and feelings and accept them as they are – which can help you manage your emotions and feel happier and healthier overall. [Click here](#) for more information and audio recordings to help you practice mindfulness. [Click here](#) for additional articles on stress and tools to help relax and calm your mind and body.

Clinical Care. Remember, digital self-care tools aren’t meant to take the place of clinical care. If you need help and support, please reach out. Millions of people seek mental health services

every year. We offer many options for members with mental health, emotional, and addiction issues. We’ll help you find care that works for you.

[Call us](#) and we’ll assess your needs and discuss treatment options. You don’t need a referral from your doctor to access mental health services. If you think you have a medical or psychiatric emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

myStrength App. This is a cognitive behavioral therapy app that we’ve used with patients for nearly 2 years. [Click here](#) to watch a 45 second video and learn more about myStrength. Our clinicians reviewed and chose myStrength for adult patients based on its effectiveness. It is uniquely designed to provide personal inspiration, build resilience, and strengthen skills for strong mental health. Interested? [Click here](#) to get started.

Calm App. Calm is the #1 app for meditation and sleep — designed to help lower stress, reduce anxiety, and more. Kaiser Permanente members can access all the great features of Calm at no cost. Please visit www.kp.org/selfcareapps to access the app.

