

[IMAGE]

## Eat to Sleep: Supplement Guide

By Todd Singleton, DC

Every night, millions of people have trouble falling and/or staying asleep. Traditionally, this is caused by stress, anxiety, caffeine, a lack of physical activity or overstimulation before bed, as well as by nighttime discomfort or pain. But there is another common cause few doctors consider – a poor diet.

If you are eating a poor diet, you may experience blood sugar swings, hunger pangs, cravings or other disturbances that affect your ability to sleep soundly. You may use prescription drugs to get to sleep, only to become dependent on them and frustrated by their side effects (and their cost!).

### The Prescription Problem

Prescription sleeping aids not only fail to address the underlying reasons for sleeplessness, but are often addictive and can have side effects ranging from diarrhea to daytime drowsiness.

I've broken down the average pricing on some commonly prescribed sleep aids to give you an idea of the monthly and annual costs for the drugs you or someone you know could be paying for (these represent the average costs for seven days):<sup>1</sup>

- Lunesta (1 mg tablet): \$56, which adds up to \$2,912 per year
- Sonata (10 mg capsule): \$38, which adds up to \$1,976 per year
- Ambien (5 mg tablet): \$54, which adds up to \$2,808 per year

Beyond diarrhea and drowsiness, you may commonly experience headaches, dizziness and nausea. In more extreme cases, you may develop behavioral changes, difficulty swallowing or breathing, heartbeat irregularities, memory problems, or even hallucinations! You may seek further treatment for these symptoms, adding to your prescription list, worsening your health and draining your wallets.

Insomnia - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark An inability to sleep will affect your ability to work and function in the world, and can dramatically impact your health. Sleeplessness can leave you feeling groggy, irritable, unable to focus, and less able to deal with stress. Even minimal amounts of sleep loss will take a toll on mood, energy, and efficiency. Over time, these effects can cause you to gain weight, get sick

more easily and become susceptible to a wide variety of chronic illnesses.

### **What's Missing: Education**

The problem is our society accepts subpar eating habits as "normal." With fast-food restaurants on every corner and junk food in every convenience store, you may not even realize that the way you are eating is unhealthy. It's important to understand that the foods you eat have a direct effect on every aspect of your health, including your ability to sleep. It's critical to understand that by giving the body 100 percent nutrition, you pave the way for the body to readjust its biological clock and remove the impediments that currently interfere with sleep.

### **A Nutrition / Supplement Plan to Help Regulate Sleep**

When used in conjunction with a healthy, nutrient-rich diet, supplements can help to fill in the gaps and ensure you are getting 100 percent nutrition. If you're suffering from insomnia, I recommend you talk to your doctor about adding the following nutrients to your daily regimen:

*Calcium:* Low levels of calcium in the body are known to contribute to frequent awakenings in the night. This mineral has a natural calming effect on the nervous system and works by helping the body convert tryptophan (an essential amino acid) into serotonin. Serotonin can be converted into melatonin, a key hormone that helps to regulate the sleep cycle.<sup>2</sup>

*Magnesium* helps the body properly absorb and utilize calcium, helping to calm the nervous system and relax muscles. A magnesium deficiency can cause leg cramps and spasms, which inhibits restful slumber.<sup>3</sup>

*Vitamin B12* aids in the metabolism of calcium and magnesium, working with them to ensure that tryptophan is converted into serotonin (and then, into melatonin). This makes B12 essential for a healthy sleep cycle.<sup>4</sup>

*Vitamin D:* Most Americans suffer from low levels of vitamin D, even though this vitamin is essential in supporting the body's usage of calcium and magnesium. It also helps in modulating the body's biological 24-hour clock as it relates to the sleep/wake cycle.<sup>5</sup>

*Melatonin* is a powerful hormone that helps to regulate the body's sleep and wake cycles. Supplementing with melatonin can help to reset your biological clock and convince the body to fall asleep at the proper

time.<sup>6</sup>

*Herbs* can also provide natural relief from insomnia. I typically recommend a combination of valerian root, chamomile and hops flower. Together, these herbs promote restfulness and make it easier to fall asleep.

### **Talk to Your Doctor**

If you're struggling to get the sleep you need, get help! By providing a combination of nutritional counseling and supplementation, your doctor can help correct the underlying deficiencies that cause you to develop insomnia in the first place.

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