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7 Natural Sleep Aids that Really Work

By: Dr Axe, July 26 2016.

We have a natural sleep-wake cycle called **circadian rhythm**. By being in sync with that rhythm, we can easily improve our sleep. A regular sleep/wake pattern helps you feel refreshed and ready for your day. Having good sleep hygiene is crucial, such as avoiding stimulants like too much coffee to prevent **caffeine overdose**, and we've all been told to get those electronics far from the bedroom — both for better sleep and to avoid **nomophobia**. Thankfully, good sleep hygiene combined with the following natural sleep aids can make all the difference in getting some body-craving restful sleep.

1. Food Is Medicine!

It's a well-known fact that having a heavy meal just before bed can cause you to have a poor night of rest, but did you know that there are some foods that could help you sleep better? That doesn't mean you need to add calories necessarily or eat a huge meal right before bed, but it could mean that you can incorporate some of these foods into your dinner or as a small after-dinner snack. Probably the most commonly known characteristic that can help through food is **tryptophan** — yes, that sleepiness from the Thanksgiving turkey is no joke. Tryptophan is an amino acid that can help the brain get into a relaxed state, similar to serotonin and melatonin. You can obtain tryptophan and serotonin from carbohydrates, particularly 100 percent whole grain oats, brown rice, corn or quinoa. A study published in *Sports Medicine* out of France was conducted to help better understand ways to improve the sleep of elite soccer players given their chaotic schedules, late-night games and need for recovery through a good night of sleep. The study found that by consuming carbohydrates — such as honey and whole grain bread — and some forms of protein, especially those that contain serotonin-producing tryptophan like turkey, nuts and seeds, it helped promote restorative sleep. Even tryptophan-filled tart cherry juice, which also contains healing properties like antioxidants, could be a great option.

2. Calcium for Relaxation

Did you know that calcium has an affect on our sleep cycle? It's true. According to the *European Neurology Journal*, calcium levels are at their highest during our deep rapid eye movement (REM) sleep periods. What this means is that if you never get to the REM sleep phase or if it's limited, it could be related to a **calcium deficiency**. Researchers indicate that the calcium is important because it helps the cells in the brain use the

tryptophan to create melatonin — a natural body-producing sleep aid. A glass of warm goat's milk kefir could do the trick by providing calcium and magnesium, both of which work best when consumed together.

3. Magnesium May Help You Get the Slumber You Need

Now let's roll into more about magnesium and how it can help with that your sleep state. If you have trouble sleeping, it could be due to a **magnesium deficiency**. Studies have shown that higher magnesium levels can help induce a deeper sleep, and as I noted, this is especially true when taken together with calcium for better absorption. Research from the Biochemistry and Neurophysiology Unit at the University of Geneva's Department of Psychiatry indicate that higher levels of magnesium actually helped provide better, more consistent sleep since magnesium is a calming nutrient. In addition to the goat's milk kefir, foods like spinach, pumpkin seeds and even dark chocolate can help since they're loaded with magnesium.

Here are a few snacks to consume for getting a good night of sleep:

- Half a banana with a few almonds
- Crackers with almond butter
- Gluten-free oatmeal with honey and dark cherries
- Small Ezekial wrap with turkey and cranberries
- Small glass of warm goat's milk kefir with turmeric and a dash of cinnamon
- Chamomile, passion flower and valerian tea
- Small glass of tart cherry juice

4. Essential Oils for Sleep

It's no secret that **essential oils** are a natural method for just about anything you can think of, and sleep is no different. Prescription medications can cause numerous side effects and make you feel jet-lagged upon waking, among other negative side effects. Essential oils, on the other hand, don't cause these adverse reactions. A study published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* was conducted with cancer patients, a common group that has serious issues with sleeping well, to better understand whether aromatherapy using essential oils could help provide some much-needed healing shut-eye. Aromasticks were given to patients over a 13-week period. Of the participants, 94 percent reported using the aromasticks with 92 percent reporting that they would continue use. **Bergamot oil** and **lavender oil**, in addition to sandalwood, frankincense and mandarin, were combined to create the useful sleep-inducing blend.

5. Passion Flower for Calming and Restful Sleep

In my article about **passion flower**, you can see the numerous benefits, including calming and anti-anxiety effects. When we have anxiety, it can greatly affect how we sleep

because you just cannot seem to turn the brain off — especially while you're trying to rest. Passion flower can provide the calming effect needed to help stop that vicious circle of thought. Clinical trials have shown that passion flower can reduce anxiety as effectively as the prescribed drug known as benzodiazepine oxazepam. A four-week, double-blind study of patients with generalized anxiety disorder compared passion flower to the common anti-anxiety drug. While the oxazepam worked a little faster, both were the same in terms of effectiveness — however, the passion flower did not cause problems with job performance, such as drowsiness while on the job, unlike the oxazepam. This shows that passion flower is one of the most powerful anti-anxiety natural sleep aids that doesn't cause lingering tiredness the next day.

6. Valerian Root to Induce Sleep

Valerian root is a plant with roots that contain many healing properties, in particular for a relaxation and sedative effects. It's often found in combination with chamomile in a tea. By increasing the amount of gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA), it helps calm the nerve cells in the brain, resulting in a calming effect. GABA works by blocking brain signals that cause anxiety and that ongoing trickle effect that can come from it. This calming effect has made it a favorite **natural remedy for anxiety** too. If you're not fond of the tea, you can go with a capsule form that can be found at your local health food store.

7. St. John's Wort May Help Provide Sleep Through Less Depression

Depression is a common characteristic that can lead to lack of sleep. **St John's wort** may be able to help. More recent studies indicate that chemicals, such as hyperforin and adhyperforin, are found in St. John's wort, acting as little messengers in the brain that drive mood and work as powerful antidepressants. The National Sleep Foundation reports that insomnia is common among those who are depressed and notes that people with insomnia have a much higher risk of becoming depressed. Research from the Department of Psychology at the University of North Texas shows that depression may affect many aspects of sleep, from getting to sleep to staying asleep. By **treating depression** using St. John's wort, you may be able to find that restful sleep your body and mind longs for. (

How Much Sleep Do We Need?

It's no secret that good sleep provides better function at work and home, along with even better fitness and athletic performance. The National Sleep Foundation released a poll taken in 2015 that clearly indicated quality of life is far better for those who had a good night of sleep of at least seven hours. The National Sleep Foundation recommends the following amount of sleep for varying age groups:

- Newborns: 14–17 hours

- Infants: 12–15 hours
- Toddlers 11–14 hours
- Preschoolers 10–13 hours
- School-aged children: 9–11 hours
- Teens: 8–10 hours
- Adults: 7–9 hours
- Older adults: 7–8 hours