Sleep and Food: How what we eat can affect our nights

Our diet affects almost every aspect of how we feel emotionally and physically; eating a balance of food groups can support with reducing a number of health issues including heart disease, diabetes, obesity and also, more recently suggested, depression and anxiety. But what we eat and drink can also have an impact on our sleep.

It's common knowledge that caffeine is renowned for making it difficult to fall asleep. But what other food and drinks can take their toll?

Interestingly, the same meals that impact our waistlines can also be the ones that affect how well we sleep. Eating too many calories, high fat foods, high-carbohydrate or heavily processed meals and snacks can all have an unexpected affect. Sugars can be particularly problematic, as they affect our blood sugar levels and ultimately our sleeping pattern. If we aren't careful, we can fall into a damaging cycle whereby loss of sleep makes us crave more 'junk-food' but the food itself then decreases our quality of sleep!

Being too 'full' at bedtime can also interfere with falling asleep. When we do finally get to sleep, our quality of rest can be affected due to our ongoing digestion throughout the night. Whilst its best to avoid a big meal before bed, it's often the moment when some of us get those hunger pangs. Having something light like a yoghurt, banana, or low sugar cereal can do the trick without causing too much interference.

Staying hydrated can positively affect our rest. It's a good idea to drink 6-8 glasses of water a day (that's around the 2-litre mark), as this will help you to remain hydrated, boost alertness and focus and can help to reduce shifts in your energy. When we are dehydrated, we can often feel tired or sluggish which will result in disrupted sleep.

What can we do to support our sleeping patterns?

- Try to balance your meal with fats, proteins and carbs and nutrient rich vegetables

- Try to cut down on spicy, processed and junk foods – plant-based meals can be helpful with this!

- When the evening comes around, some helpful snacks for sleep can be tart cherries, almonds, and warm milk (all found to help us drift off at night!)

- Switch to decaf teas and coffees in the afternoon/evening – ideally have your last caffeinated drink 5 hours before you plan on going to bed

- Drink more water regularly throughout the day