

How sleep aids better gut health

Chapter 01: Sleep makes your body function

When you sleep well, your digestive system, and your whole body, functions properly. Sleep is a bidirectional communication regarding our psychophysical health, because sleep influences your hormone levels, your mood, your weight and your metabolism. So it's important to always pay attention to it.

Recent research has found that an increase in good gut bacteria correlates to longer sleep and better sleep. This is a direct connection between having good bacteria, good digestion and good sleep.

Chapter 02: Lack of sleep leads to stress

A lack of sleep affects your gut, your stress levels and your

metabolism. It also increases your cortisol levels, which is a hormone produced in the adrenal glands. And it influences your cardiovascular health. Dysbiosis also occurs, which means a reduction in the bacteria that produce serotonin. This is crucial because a huge 95 per cent of your mood-regulating neurotransmitter, serotonin, is produced in your gut. So here we have the undeniable link between gut bacteria, stress and sleep.

Chapter 03: Decreased digestive distress

While you sleep your good bacteria thrives. These microbes are able to produce enough of the sleep hormone, melatonin, part of which is also produced in the intestine. If you sleep well, any other digestive distresses, such as irritable

bowel syndrome, are reduced. In general, you will see a big improvement in gastrointestinal discomfort, if you have any.

Chapter 04: How much sleep do you need?

It's recommended that you get at least seven to nine hours of sleep every night. How will you know if you've slept well? The next day, if you wake up feeling tired and with brain fog, then you didn't have a good sleep; but if you wake up full of energy and ready to start your day, then you have recovered and had a good sleep.

In terms of timings, the key is to be regular, for example if you typically get up at 7am then you should be asleep by 11pm. This is because of your circadian rhythm and the body beginning to produce melatonin in order to get your body ready for rest. Your natural 24-hour cycle, the circadian rhythm, varies from person to person and it depends on what is normal for you, so timings may vary. Listen to the signals and cues your body sends you – such as a lack of

energy, moodiness, headache or difficulty concentrating.

Chapter 05: Bedtime dos and don'ts

Having a wind-down routine in the evenings helps prepare your body for a good night's sleep. My first important tip is to avoid eating too late at night, as well as trying to avoid alcohol, which makes you sleepy but then alters the middle of your sleep cycle, decreasing your sleep quality.

Lifestyle modifications are really important for a good sleep. Being active during the day is a key component, because then your body's ready to recover and regenerate at night. Practicing good sleep hygiene also promotes quality sleep. Sleep hygiene refers to healthy sleep habits, including going to bed at the same time every night, and optimizing your sleep environment – checking the temperature of the room, avoiding blue lights from screens, and practicing some activities to help you wind down, like stretching, breathing exercises, journaling, reading,

or listening to calm music. All of this makes your body realize that it's time to sleep.

If you have too much on your mind and have trouble letting go, then get out of bed and write down your thoughts. It eases the mind and will help you switch off. If you find yourself awake in the middle of the night and can't fall back to sleep, then this same process helps. You could also try listening to sleeping sounds or white noise.