

# Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS



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## Restful Sleep: How to Get Enough



**Sleep is essential for us to function at our best, think clearly, and stay in good health. Fortunately, some simple steps can help you to routinely get a good night's rest.**

I've been seeing more sleep problems among my patients since the pandemic began, but these problems aren't always going away as things seem to return to a more normal way of life. And my patients aren't the only ones experiencing these difficulties.

A survey of over 2,000 American adults, by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, found that 56 percent had experienced more sleep disturbances due to the pandemic. Problems included difficulty falling or staying asleep, sleeping less, and experiencing less restful sleep.<sup>1</sup>

Among those with sleep issues, just over half have been using more medications, supplements, or other substances to try to improve sleep. And most have used such sleep aids more often in recent times. As you may know, I favor natural remedies over medications whenever possible, and there are some herbs and other supplements that can help (I'll cover these in a moment).

But there are also more basic, underlying habits that rob us of good sleep, and these have been plaguing many Americans long before an infectious disease led to lockdowns and the related disruptions in so many aspects of our lives.

In fact, sleep deprivation has been a growing problem for years. For example, large government health surveys show that the number of Americans who sleep less than 6 hours per night increased from 28 percent to nearly 33 percent between 2008 and 2018.<sup>2</sup>

Such surveys don't delve into the reasons why so many people don't get enough sleep. But based on my experience, it's likely that basic sleep habits — "sleep hygiene" in science speak — play a major role.

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**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:**  
**How to Improve Balance  
and Prevent Falls**

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The simplest reason could be not allowing enough time for a good night's sleep. It sounds like a no-brainer but it can be challenging. Parents of a newborn, for example, know this only too well. Taking care of adult family members and hectic work schedules are other common sleep robbers.

However, it's often possible to manage obligations in a way that allows enough time for proper rest each day, if getting enough sleep is given its rightful priority.

## Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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## How Much Sleep Do You Really Need?

There are rules of thumb for how much sleep is enough: 7 to 9 hours between the ages of 18 and 64, and 7 to 8 hours after that for healthy people. But these are averages, rather than precise, tailor-made recommendations for every living human.

I've had patients who thought they were getting enough sleep for years, but they were consistently falling short of their personal needs. And correcting that shortfall gave them a new lease on life. Unblocking their body's ability to lose weight, helping to get blood sugar into a healthy range, and much improved energy and mood were among the benefits they were surprised to experience.

So, how do you determine the right amount of sleep for you? Test yourself.

Choose a day when you can sleep in as long as you like, without an alarm or other disruptions that could wake you up. And sleep until you wake up naturally. That's how much sleep you actually need.

I realize that there may be other issues, such as waking up during the night or not being able to fall asleep, and I'll address the reasons for these. But the answer to *how much* sleep is best for you is as simple as the test I just described.

## Do You Sleep Well?

The answer is not as obvious as you might think. I have patients who err in both directions: thinking their sleep is good when it really isn't, and vice versa. Long-term habits, good or bad, can make a situation seem "normal" when it may or may not be optimal.

To get a better sense of your own sleep, ask yourself these three questions:

- Do I fall asleep within 10 minutes?
- If I wake up during the night — a bathroom trip is a common reason — do I fall asleep again within 10 minutes?
- Do I wake up in the morning feeling rested?

If you answered "yes" to all three questions, you're sleeping well. If your answer to any one of these was "no," there's a need for improvement.

The issue of waking up during the night can be confusing. Many people wake up to go to the bathroom, and this doesn't necessarily indicate a problem. If it happens once per night and you easily go back to sleep, there's no need to worry. But if you have to go multiple times each night, or if you can't get back to sleep, that's when this needs attention. Keep reading for what to do.

## How to Start Improving Your Sleep

I'm going to describe the most common reasons for less-than-optimal sleep. As you read about these, one or more may jump out as obvious factors that you can easily correct. Adjusting the temperature of your bedroom is an example. Go ahead and make those changes.

Other ways to improve your sleep, such as changing familiar habits or your diet, or adding regular exercise to your life, will take more time and effort. But every step helps.

## Exposure to Light

Our bodies have a built-in 24-hour clock — our circadian rhythm. Light and darkness tell our internal clock what time it is: when we should sleep and wake up.

You've probably heard that using your computer or other electronic devices before bedtime is a bad idea because it will make it harder for you to fall asleep. The screens of our devices emit blue light, a wavelength of light that is especially disruptive to our natural sleeping rhythms. Studies have shown the connection, but this isn't the whole story about light and sleep.

Research shows that *any* type of bright light can disrupt your natural sleep rhythms if you're exposed to it during the two hours or so before bedtime.<sup>3</sup> So, softer light in the evening will help your body to wind down. But there's even more to know.

It isn't just evening light that affects our internal 24-hour clock and our sleep. *Morning* light plays a big part. A study of office workers found that the more they were exposed to bright daylight in the morning, the better they slept through the night, and the less likely they were to be depressed.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the more daylight you get during the whole day, the better you're likely to sleep. An analysis of all the available science on light and sleep concluded that being exposed to natural light during the day may be the most important factor in sleeping well. In addition, bright daylight may make you less sensitive to light in the evening.<sup>5</sup>

## Your Sleeping Environment

When I moved into a new house a few years ago, one thing immedi-

ately became obvious: The bedroom needed better window blinds. The bright morning sun streamed in at sunrise and woke me up.

The next morning, getting light-blocking blinds became my top priority. And once that morning sun was blocked, I slept well. If morning sun wakes you up, blocking it is a must.

A bedroom can also be too bright at night if outdoor light streams in. Again, room-darkening blinds can solve the problem.

Temperature is another important factor to keep in mind. Generally, a cool bedroom is best, but the exact temperature should be whatever helps you sleep well. If your feet are cold in bed, this can also keep you up. A hot water bottle is a simple, inexpensive way to warm your feet.

Noise is an obvious sleep disruptor. If you can't stop the noise, try ear plugs.

## A Sleep-Friendly Diet

When I bring up diet in relation to sleep, my patients are usually surprised. How could the two be related? Eating in a way that leads to unstable blood sugar is one of the top reasons for lack of restful sleep, and I'll explain why.

Your brain uses about 20 percent of your body's basic fuel — blood sugar — which is produced after you eat carbs. There's also a back-up system: Some extra blood sugar is stored in the liver and can be released when needed to keep energy levels stable. But if you've habitually been eating a high-carb diet, this system goes haywire and eventually disrupts sleep.

## TV and Sleep

A recent study found that watching TV or using an electronic device before bedtime did not always disrupt sleep. In some cases, it improved sleep.

People in the study kept a diary to track their sleep and use of TV and electronic devices before bedtime. Meanwhile, researchers objectively measured participants' sleep quality with a gadget that monitored brain activity while they slept.

The study found that watching TV or using electronic devices to watch videos or listen to music within the hour before bed could enhance sleep. However, the positive effect was observed only if:

- The content was relaxing and did not trigger negative emotions or stress.



- People were focused on the content and were not doing something else at the same time (multitasking).
- They spent no more than an hour before bedtime watching TV or videos.

Bottom line: News at 11 pm is not a good idea. However, if you find that adorable animal videos or certain types of TV shows relax you, see if these help you sleep well.

That said, it's important to do what works for you. And that may be reading a real book — the traditional kind that's printed on paper — before you go to sleep.

Source: Ellithorpe, M.E., et al. "The complicated impact of media use before bed on sleep: Results from a combination of objective EEG sleep measurement and media diaries." J Sleep Res. 2022 Feb 8;e13551.



When that happens, these are symptoms: During the day, if you go without eating for more than a few hours, you might feel tired or irritable, find it hard to focus, or even feel dizzy. These are signs of low blood sugar, and they don't go away until you eat something. Most often, people reach for sugary or starchy foods in these situations, which perpetuates the cycle.

When this phenomenon happens while you're sleeping, your brain feels starved and you wake up feeling anxious. Then, it can be hard to go back to sleep.

Eating a low-carb diet and eating often enough will break this cycle. Not only will it help you sleep through the night but it will also give you stable energy throughout the day. I describe the details of my diet in earlier issues of this newsletter, listed on page 5 in *Related to This Topic*. And these are the key things to do:

**Time your food:** Eat within an hour of waking up, and every three hours during the day. This generally amounts to three meals with snacks in between. Each meal and snack should contain some fat.

**Avoid sugar:** This includes sugary drinks and sweet foods, and foods that are high in starch, such as chips, pretzels, and other snacks made from corn, wheat, or other grains.

**Before going to bed:** If your bedtime is more than three hours after dinner, have a small snack that naturally contains protein and fat but is low in carbs. A spoonful of nut butter, a hard-boiled egg, or a piece of cheese are some good examples.

**If you wake up during the night for no obvious reason:** It's likely because of the blood-sugar malfunction I described above. Get up and have a small snack that is low in carbs but contains protein and fat — the same type of snack as I suggested before going to bed.

## Getting Ready for Bed

Once your head hits the pillow, overthinking things — about the day that just ended, the next one, or other situations — can stop you from falling asleep. In addition to managing stressful situations in your life, making a to-do list before bed can help.

One study compared the effects of keeping a journal about events that had happened and a to-do list for the next day. It found that the to-do list was more effective in relieving worry at bedtime and promoting better sleep.<sup>6</sup>

It's also essential to avoid stimulating drinks, which include

those with caffeine and alcohol. Consider sipping some chamomile tea, which is calming and can help to improve sleep; it can also help to control blood sugar.<sup>7</sup> Or try a tea with a blend of calming herbs, such as Sleepytime tea.

The main thing is, it's important to wind down at the end of the day and relax before you get into bed and turn out the lights.

## Exercise for Better Sleep

Almost all types of physical activity can help you get better sleep. The exception is this: If you go to extremes by doing intense exercise that is really hard on your body, it can generate a lot of stress. And stress can keep you up at night. This is not as common as lack of activity, but it does happen.

The key thing to know about exercise is that it needs to be done consistently to improve sleep. It isn't a matter of trying to exhaust yourself by doing intense aerobic

## About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,<sup>TM</sup> a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer's disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*.



activity on one day. Rather, regular exercise improves brain and overall function, and over time, this leads to better sleep.

Relaxing Exercise

A review of research found that exercise can be as effective as sleeping pills.<sup>8</sup> But unlike drugs, exercise also reduces anxiety and depression that contribute to insomnia — without the side effects of drugs.

Exercise that has a relaxing effect, such as tai chi, yoga, or stretching, has been shown to be effective for better sleep, especially among older people. These types of movement are easy on joints and have a calming effect. To enhance sleep, the exercise needs to be done consistently. You can try in-person group classes or follow routines online. They are easy to find.

Aerobic Exercise and Weight Training

Both aerobic exercise and weight training are other effective ways to improve sleep. Results of a recent study — one of the largest and longest trials of its kind — were recently presented at a conference of the American Heart Association.

The study compared the effects of different exercise regimens on sleep, in a group of 386 adults. All were overweight or obese, had not been doing any type of exercise, and had high blood pressure.

The participants were divided into four groups, and did either weight training, aerobic training, a combination of the two, or no exercise. The exercise programs, which were supervised by fitness trainers, consisted of one-hour sessions, three times per week for a year.<sup>9</sup> And here’s what the study found:

- Among people who were not sleeping at least 7 hours per night, weight training increased their nightly sleep time the most, by an average of 40 minutes. In comparison, nightly sleep time increased by an average of 23 minutes with aerobic exercise and by 17 minutes with a combination of aerobic and weight training.
- Weight training also improved what scientists call “sleep efficiency”: the amount of time you spend sleeping once you’re in bed, rather than just lying awake. Aerobic exercise didn’t improve this point.
- Both aerobic and weight training reduced the number of times people woke up during the night for various reasons, such as being too hot or too cold, needing to go to the bathroom, or feeling pain.

For difficulties with sleep, the researchers suggested doing two sessions of weight or resistance training per week. The study used weight equipment in a gym, but

you could also use resistance bands at home. The important thing is to do a series of exercises that use all your major muscles. Aerobic exercise — brisk walking, for example — should also be done for overall health.

Supplements for Better Sleep

I recommend taking a multivitamin to ensure that you get enough of the essential vitamins and some minerals that support healthy function of your body. Look for a product with about 100 percent of the Daily Value of each nutrient, preferably made with food-based ingredients, and take it in the morning with food.

In addition, these are some supplements that can enhance sleep. They can be taken individually or in sleep formulas.


**Theanine:** A substance found in green and black tea, theanine can calm you down, reduce stress, and help you fall and stay asleep if you take it before bedtime. It isn’t addictive and

### Related to This Topic

These are some earlier issues of this newsletter that address related topics:

Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
Low-Carb Diet Basics	1	8	The Guide to Healthy Eating
Healthy Carbs	3	6	The Diabetic’s Guide to Eating Carbs
Healthy Meat	3	2	The Diabetic’s Guide to Eating Meat
Healthy Fats	4	11	Healthy Fats: Deadly Myths and Life-Saving Facts
Low-Carb Diet Tips	5	1	How to Stick With a Healthy Diet This Year
Sleep	2	2	The 10-Minute Sleep Solution

Access these online by logging in to [www.NaturalHealthConnections.com](http://www.NaturalHealthConnections.com).



won't make you feel drowsy the next morning. Studies have found that 200 mg daily is a therapeutic amount.<sup>10</sup> If taken during the day, theanine can help to reduce stress and improve focus.

**Magnesium:** Studies have shown that magnesium supplements can help older people to fall asleep faster. One review of research focused on adults who suffered from insomnia and were between 50 and 80 years old. It found that study participants who took daily magnesium supplements fell asleep, on average, 17 minutes sooner than people who took a placebo.<sup>11</sup>

I recommend adding powdered magnesium to your water bottle and sipping it throughout the day. If you experience loose stools, that means you've taken more

magnesium than your system can absorb, so take a bit less.

Another way to get magnesium is by taking a hot bath with Epsom salts, which are made with magnesium. The mineral will be absorbed through your skin and will help you relax.

**Melatonin:** This is a hormone our bodies produce at night, in response to darkness. It regulates our internal body clock. Melatonin supplements are especially good for jet lag, to reset your internal clock to a new time zone, or if you want to change your routine to fall asleep earlier.

Studies show that taking up to 5 mg of melatonin before bedtime is safe for healthy people and may improve sleep.<sup>12</sup> Consider it one possible aid to use in conjunction

with the other sleep-enhancing approaches I've described.

**Valerian:** This herb has been used for insomnia and anxiety for centuries. When taken before bedtime, studies show that it can help you to fall asleep faster and to stay asleep.<sup>13</sup> Dosages vary, depending on the type of extract, so follow product directions.

### A Final Word

It's easy to overlook the true value of restful sleep, but it's essential for every aspect of health: from controlling blood pressure and weight to preventing diabetes and memory problems. And getting enough sleep just makes you feel better.



### Checklist for Better Sleep

A combination of habits will help you to relax at night, sleep well, and feel refreshed in the morning.

- ☐ Aim to get lots of natural light during the day, especially sunlight in the morning.
- ☐ Eat a low-carb diet that keeps your blood sugar stable.
- ☐ Exercise regularly.
- ☐ If you drink anything with caffeine, including coffee, tea, energy drinks, or soda, avoid these in the evening. Instead, drink chamomile tea or other, soothing, caffeine-free herbal teas. Try a few to find your favorite.
- ☐ Lower your lighting during the evening hours.
- ☐ If you watch TV or videos, stick with relaxing content — not evening news or other stress-

inducing material. Or avoid screens altogether before bedtime.

- ☐ Keep your bedroom dark and quiet.
- ☐ Turn down your bedroom temperature to a comfortable level that helps you sleep.
- ☐ To avoid or reduce waking up for bathroom trips, drink plenty of water during the day, rather than loading up on fluids in the evening.
- ☐ If waking up at night is a problem and your bedtime is more than 3 hours after you've eaten, have a small snack of protein and fat before you brush your teeth, to keep blood sugar stable during the night.

Winding down at the end of the day and avoiding things that can disrupt your natural body clock will help you get restful, restorative sleep.

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# Fall Asleep Faster and Stay Asleep Longer!



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# Vitamin K2 for a Healthy Heart and Strong Bones

Much of the health information we hear or read focuses on a specific aspect of health: how to keep your heart in shape, for example, or how to maintain strong bones. So, you may be wondering what a healthy heart has to do with healthy bones.

Vitamin K2 is essential for the health of both the heart and the bones. It isn't recommended often enough, but a shortfall can lead to weak bones and stiff arteries that cause heart disease.

## Bone Health Remedy Gone Wrong

For years, older people have been told to take calcium supplements to prevent bone loss. The idea was, since calcium is the single biggest building block of bone, taking calcium supplements should make bones stronger in later life.

More recently, vitamin D has also been recommended for healthy bones (and overall health). Vitamin D increases calcium absorption, so you might expect that it would help to reduce age-related bone loss.

Unfortunately, the results have been disappointing. This became evident after many studies looked at the longer-term effects of supplementation with these nutrients.

For example, one review of research looked at 33 studies with a total of more than 51,000 adults. These studies tracked bone density and incidence of fractures among people over age 50 who took calcium, vitamin D, a combination of the two, or

neither of these supplements. The conclusion: While the supplements very slightly increased bone density, it was not enough to reduce the rate of fractures.<sup>1</sup>

## Heart Risk Discovered

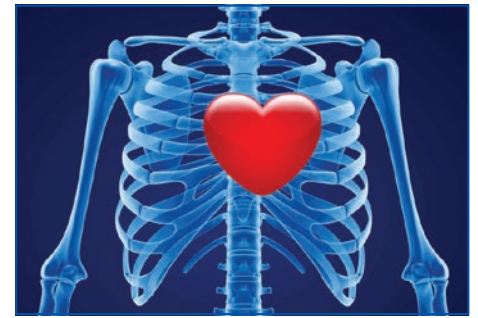
Meanwhile, studies began to find that taking calcium supplements could be risky for the heart. Although calcium from food doesn't pose any risks, calcium from supplements can get deposited in arteries, causing heart disease.

Numerous studies have documented this. For example, one study of over 10,000 women found that taking calcium supplements raised the risk for coronary artery disease.<sup>2</sup> Other research, which tracked more than 23,000 people, found that calcium supplements increased risk for heart attacks.<sup>3</sup>

## The Vitamin K2 Solution

Vitamin K2 can help to solve both bone and heart issues. Studies show that it prevents harmful calcium deposits in arteries, makes blood vessels more flexible, and improves the health of people who already have heart disease. It may also help to prevent diabetes.<sup>4</sup>

Studies also show that vitamin K2 helps calcium to be absorbed and utilized more effectively in bones. The supplement increases bone density and strength and — most important — decreases fractures among older people.<sup>5</sup> Even in women who already have osteoporosis, vitamin K2 has



reduced the risk of fractures.<sup>6</sup> This is what calcium supplements were supposed to do — but failed.

I recommend getting calcium from food and always taking vitamin K2 with vitamin D supplements. There are two forms of vitamin K2: MK-4 and MK-7. Studies have used between 15 mg and 45 mg of MK-4, or 180 mcg of MK-7. You can take either one or, in some supplements, a combination of the two.

One caution: Vitamin K2 reduces the effectiveness of warfarin (Coumadin), the blood-thinning drug, but you can still benefit. Consult with your doctor to have your drug dose adjusted to compensate for the effect of the supplement and take a consistent amount. Newer blood-thinning drugs don't interact with vitamin K2.

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# TAKE COLLAGEN PEPTIDES FOR Smooth and Comfortable Aging



When you're young, you have collagen galore. You can run, jump and bend with ease. But as you age you steadily lose it. And then you begin to have problems.

Starting at age 25, you lose 1% to 2% of your collagen each year. And at the same time your body's natural collagen production steadily declines.

By the time you're 55 or 60, your levels are significantly reduced, and you're making very little new collagen.

This shortfall sets the stage for the ailments we associate with aging—achy joints, weak bones and muscles, stiff arteries, and wrinkled and sagging skin.

Low levels of collagen can also cause leaky gut and digestive issues. That's because the lining of your intestines rely on collagen for structural integrity. The same is true for your arteries.

## Why you need more collagen

Collagen is essential to your mobility, your muscle strength, and your joint comfort. It's also the key to smooth and flexible arteries. Youthful looking skin. Stronger hair and nails. And a healthy digestive system.

In fact, it makes up 75% of your skin. 80% of your ligaments. 90% of your tendons. 67% of your cartilage. And 30% of your bones.

Think of it as the glue that holds everything together. If you don't have enough, the whole system starts to break down.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to get the replacement collagen you need every day.

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# Being “Up and About” Protects the Heart

I don't often hear anyone talk about being “up and about.” So, it caught my eye when a recent study found that being up and about was really good for the heart.

What, exactly, does it mean? The dictionary defines “up and about” as being out of bed, moving around, especially after an illness or injury. But the authors of the recent study used the phrase in a broader sense: to describe being on your feet, doing common, everyday tasks such as cooking, washing dishes, cleaning, tidying up around the house, gardening, taking a shower, shopping, and such. It's literally anything you would do in the normal course of a day while on your feet and moving around.

This is quite different from today's concept of exercise, which generally means walking for the purpose of improving fitness or following some type of structured fitness regimen in a gym, in an exercise class, or at home. These structured activities are what experts usually have in mind when they recommend getting regular exercise. But routine, day-to-day activities are also beneficial.

## What the Study Found

The new study tracked more than 5,000 women who were 63 years old, or older, at the start. Between 2012 and 2014, researchers measured each woman's activity for 7 days, using an accelerometer: a small gadget they wore on the hip to track movement. Then, in 2020, the study authors looked at how many of those women had developed heart disease, suffered a stroke, or died of heart disease.

They found that compared to women who were up and about for less than 2 hours per day, those who were up and about for 4 or more hours daily were:<sup>1</sup>

- 43 percent less likely to develop heart disease
- 30 percent less likely to suffer a stroke
- 62 percent less likely to die from heart disease

## The Take-Home Message

The benefits of walking, resistance exercise to strengthen and maintain or build muscle, and other forms of structured exercise are well documented. This new research certain-



ly does not change that. However, it's important to also recognize that all types of activity — being up and about — is good for you.

Televisions and electronic devices make it easy to sit for long periods of time. That's what entertainment is designed to do. After all, websites, TV channels, and streaming services make money by attracting your attention and keeping you watching. But it isn't necessarily in your best interest.

Don't underestimate the power of doing things like gardening, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and other chores around the house, going out to shop rather than having things delivered, or even redecorating — maybe hanging some new pictures on a wall.

It's good for your health and can spruce up your home.

# Vitamin D for Diabetic Neuropathy

Taking supplements to correct low levels of vitamin D can help to reduce pain from diabetic neuropathy, according to a recent study of 68 people suffering from the condition. Researchers found that taking 5,000 IU (125 mcg) of vitamin D daily for 8 weeks, in addition to drug treatment, produced more relief from burning pain than the drugs alone.<sup>2</sup> Blood tests showed that study participants' levels of vitamin D were low at the start

and significantly increased by the end. Earlier research has shown that insufficient vitamin D among diabetics increases risk for peripheral neuropathy.

I recommend getting vitamin D levels tested and then taking enough in supplements to achieve a blood level of 50 ng/mL. And take vitamin K2 with vitamin D (see page 8 for the reason). Very few people have optimal vitamin D levels without supplements.

1 Nguyen, S., et al. “Accelerometer-Derived Daily Life Movement Classified by Machine Learning and Incidence of Cardiovascular Disease in Older Women: The OPACH Study.” *J Am Heart Assoc.* 2022 Mar;11(5):e023433. 2 Pinzon, R.T., et al. “The Benefits of Add-on Therapy of Vitamin D 5000 IU to the Vitamin D Levels and Symptoms in Diabetic Neuropathy Patients: A Randomized Clinical Trial.” *J Pain Res.* 2021 Dec 19;14:3865-3875.



# The Healthiest Type of Coffee

For some years, studies have shown that coffee can help to reduce risks for obesity, type 2 diabetes, dementia, Parkinson's disease, cancer, and, possibly, heart disease. But not all types of coffee offer equal benefits, according to a recent British study that tracked more than 460,000 people with an average age of 56.

After tracking study participants' coffee-drinking habits and health for about 11 years, this is what researchers concluded:<sup>1</sup>

- Ground coffee was beneficial.
- Between one-half and three cups daily improved health.
- Both regular and decaf ground coffee decreased risk of death from heart disease, death from any other cause, and risk of stroke.



- Instant coffee, which has somewhat different chemistry as a result of the way it's processed, was not associated with any of these benefits.

## Brewing Methods

Earlier research has found that brewing coffee with a filter produces the healthiest drink. Filters — the type found in drip coffee makers — remove substances that may contribute to elevated cholesterol or blood pressure. Unfiltered coffees include espresso, Greek and Turkish coffees, and coffee made with a French press.

If you are sensitive to caffeine, keep in mind that decaf coffee still contains traces of caffeine. And don't load your cup of java with sugar or syrups. If you like your coffee sweet, use a natural, sugar-free sweetener such as stevia, which is available in a variety of flavored liquid forms.

# Should You Eat Goji Berries?



I've been seeing a lot of stories online about dried goji berries being good for vision, because of a study at the University of California, Davis. Researchers found that eating an ounce of dried goji berries five times per week, for three months, had a beneficial effect on the eyes.<sup>2</sup>

More specifically, goji berries are a good source of zeaxanthin, a nutrient that is found in the macula,

the back part of the eye. Increasing zeaxanthin in the eyes helps to protect vision against damage and age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of blindness.

So, should you start eating dried goji berries every day? You can, but be aware that goji berries, like all dried fruit, are high in carbohydrates.

There are 21 grams of carbs in 1 ounce of dried goji berries. I recommend no more than 60 grams of carbs daily from fruit and other high-sugar or high-starch foods such as breads, corn, and such. One ounce of dried goji berries fills one-third of your daily quota.

You can get zeaxanthin from many other foods that are not high in carbs, especially all the leafy greens and other green vegetables, such as broccoli, asparagus, and Brussels sprouts. And the fats in fish contain other eye-friendly nutrients.

There's no need to track or count the carbs in the vegetables I mentioned above because the amounts are low. And fish (like meat) doesn't contain carbs.

I'm not saying that you should never eat goji berries or any other dried fruit. But I do encourage you to view nutrition news in a broader context.

## Good Sources of Nutrients for Healthy Eyes

Food	Serving Size	Carb Content
Dried goji berries (and most other dried fruit)	1 ounce	21–22 grams
Spinach	1 cup	1 gram
Kale	1 cup	1.4 grams
Romaine lettuce	1 cup	1.6 grams
Asparagus	½ cup	3.7 grams
Broccoli	½ cup	5.6 grams
Brussels sprouts	½ cup	6 grams
Fish	4–8 ounces	0 grams

1 Simon, J., et al. "Light to moderate coffee consumption is associated with lower risk of death: a UK Biobank study." *Eur J Prev Cardiol.* 2022 Jan 20;zwac008. 2 Li, X., et al. "Goji Berry Intake Increases Macular Pigment Optical Density in Healthy Adults: A Randomized Pilot Trial." *Nutrients.* 2021 Dec; 13(12): 4409.

# Q&A

**Q: I like to take supplements in gummies or fizzy powders, but they contain carbs. Should I count these carbs as part of the 60-gram daily carb total that you recommend?** — *Claudia B.*

**A:** Generally, the answer is yes, you should count those carbs, but there may be exceptions. Vitamin gummies



and effervescent powders are flavored, and sugar is a key ingredient that gives products a taste that will appeal to most people.

The carbs in these can definitely add up, so you should include them in your 60-gram daily total. One gummy vitamin can contain 5 or more grams of carbs, and you may take more than one per day. Fizzy powders can contain 10 or more grams of carbs per serving.

There are some vitamin powders without sugar or other flavoring ingredients, and these contain no carbs. However, they do *not* taste good. I suspect that people who buy these will mix the powders in fruit-based smoothies or fruit juices — and both of these contain a significant amount of carbs, which should be counted as part of your 60-gram daily carb quota.

If you like gummies and effervescent powders, there is another option: sugar-free versions. These may be sweetened with stevia, erythritol, xylitol,

or artificial sweeteners. I favor stevia, but ultimately, it's a personal choice. Some people can experience digestive upset with the other sweeteners.

That said, sugar-free gummies and powders may still contain carbs from starches that are used to give the products a pleasant taste or texture in your mouth. The carbs will be lower than in sugar-sweetened versions, but may be 4 grams or more per serving. So, if you take more than one serving per day, the carbs can add up. On the other hand, some sugar-free products contain only 1 gram of carbs per serving,

and if you consume only one serving per day, I wouldn't worry about counting the carbs in your daily total.

If you decide to try sugar-free gummies or powders, always check the carb content on the label. By law, if one serving of a supplement contains at least 0.5 grams of carbs per serving, the carb content must be listed on the label. This applies to all supplement labels, including pills.

For readers who aren't familiar with my recommendations for counting carbs, I encourage you to get the details from earlier issues of this newsletter, listed on page 5.

**Q: Must I eat breakfast to lose weight?** — *Andrew J.*

**A:** Technically, no. But in my experience, most people will have an easier time losing weight if they eat at least a small amount of food for breakfast. The reason is this: Unstable blood sugar is the most

common reason that weight loss is difficult. A history of eating too many carbs leads to spikes and crashes in blood sugar, and the crashes trigger food cravings — especially for high-carb foods — and unpleasant symptoms such as trouble concentrating, irritability, and/or exhaustion.

Your body doesn't get fed while you sleep but it still uses energy to keep you alive. Without breakfast, your blood sugar is quite likely to crash by mid-morning, if not earlier. Faced with unpleasant symptoms and food cravings, it's hard to resist high-carb foods like donuts or sweet rolls.

Weight loss doesn't have to be a struggle. Eating breakfast, notably some fat and protein, prevents crashes in blood sugar and the related symptoms. Breakfast will help you to feel energized and clear-headed during the rest of the morning and to make healthy food choices later in the day.

## Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to [drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com](mailto:drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com). Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email [support@primalhealthlp.com](mailto:support@primalhealthlp.com) or call 877-300-7849.