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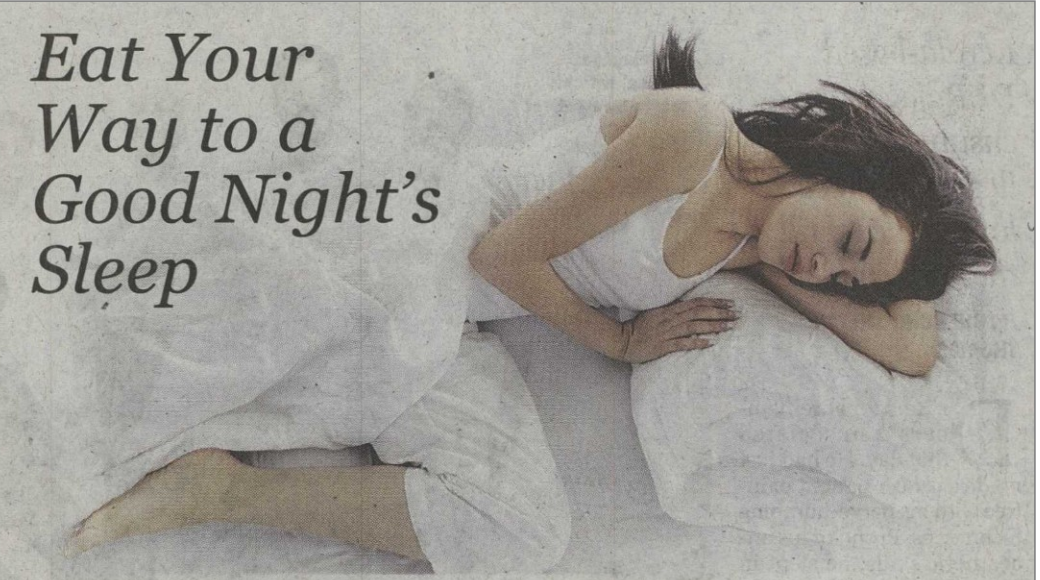
**S**leep is perhaps the sweetest word to be described phonetically—starting with a soft voiceless fricative ‘s’ and closing the word with a same voiceless plosive ‘p’. But this soft and sweet phenomenon can be a nightmare for people who can’t get enough of it, least speaking about those who suffer from a scary state of sleeplessness.

An agonised 26-year-old call centre executive, Amlan, after what he described as ages of ‘sleeplessness’ started popping sleeping pills. However, his drugged escape was short-lived as the medicines started showing side effects. It was only after he started drinking a grandmother’s concoction of warm milk with nutmegs that Amlan started experiencing a calming effect on his nerves.

As we are slowly discovering what sleep-inducing medicines can do to our body, people are gradually shifting to search for natural remedies to help them sleep. “Besides a good atmosphere, include certain food in your diet which are known to induce sleep and combat insomnia,” says Dr Anita Jatana, Chief Dietician of Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals.

Before we talk about food that helps to get a good slumber, it is crucial that we understand hormones—serotonin and melatonin—that regulate various functions such as sleep, appetite and mood. Serotonin regulates sleep, calms us down and is light sensitive, and melatonin controls our sleep cycle, and they are totally interrelated. “Include foods high in tryptophan (an essential amino acid) which helps to produce serotonin. The good sources from turkey or fish and for vegetarians milk, nuts

## Eat Your Way to a Good Night’s Sleep



Having difficulty dozing off? Read on to find how a slight change in diet can help one to snooze without the need to pop pills *By RUPAMUDRA KATAKI*

and seeds like sunflower and pumpkin and almonds, walnuts, cashewnuts, is a good way to ensure its inclusion,” recommends Jatana.

Even legumes and lentils are helpful in addressing this problem. “Legumes like beans, soya and lentils besides being good sources of tryptophan, are a good magnesium source, which also helps in relaxing muscles and calming nerves. A warm glass of milk with honey or banana is a good way to end one’s day for a good sound sleep which will result in good energy levels and improved immunity.”

According to experts, patients suffering from sleep disorders are on the rise and so is their habit to pop pills to help them sleep. However, doctors voice their concern when it comes to prescribing medicines which they believe should be the last resort. “Sleeping problems to-

### SLUMBER AID

■ **Almonds:** Contain magnesium which is a muscle relaxant and induces sleep

■ **Banana:** Rich source of magnesium and tryptophan, an amino acid that boosts sleep quality

■ **Milk:** It contains tryptophan, help in serotonin and melatonin secretion from brain

■ **Decaffeinated green tea:** It has theanine, an amino acid that helps to reduce stress and promote relaxation.

■ **Pineapple:** Helps to boost melatonin levels

■ **Walnuts:** Natural source of melatonin, reduce stress

■ **Nutmeg:** Strong sedative

■ **Mint:** Calming effect. Source of folate which helps stabilising sleep

*As recommended by Lovneet Batra, Clinical Nutritionist, Fortis La Femme*

day are increasingly rising, and we also see a growing trend of people self-medicating to induce better sleep. While sleeping pills can benefit some people with sleeping trouble, when taken unsupervised they may actually do more harm than good. For one, taking uncontrolled sleeping pills can result in dependence,” explains Dr Samir Parikh, Director, Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, Fortis Healthcare.

Popping pills can be easy, but getting rid of the habit is far from easy. “As eating medicine increases the abuse potential, increase in dose also increases the abuse potential. Patients start developing tolerance, it is advisable not to prescribe sleeping pills more than 2 week to restore the sleep,” says Dr R K Srivastava, Senior Consultant, Psychiatry at Max Super Speciality Hospital in Patparganj.