

How What You Eat Influences Your Dreams

5 MIN READ

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BY HEATHER HURLOCK

A new study reveals why your evening eating habits set the stage for good dreams and restful sleep and how simple diet tweaks can reduce nightmares.

Have you ever had weird dreams after a late-night snack, especially something cheesy? It's a common experience for many, but until recently, the scientific evidence connecting food to dreaming has been pretty thin.

A new study in *Frontiers in Psychology* from dream neuroscientist Dr. Tore Nielsen and his team at the University of Montreal takes a deep dive into the relationship between what we eat, how well we sleep, and what we dream about. Their findings suggest that what you put on your plate in the evening might actually shape the quality of your sleep and the nature of your dreams.

Food and Sleep: More Connected Than You Think

Dr. Nielsen's team surveyed over 1,000 people, asking about their diet, food sensitivities, sleep quality, and dream experiences.

About a third of those in the study reported regular nightmares. Women were more likely to remember their dreams and to report poor sleep and nightmares, and nearly twice as likely as men to report a food intolerance or allergy. The study found that about 40% of people feel certain foods improve or worsen their sleep, and 5.5% specifically notice foods affecting their dreams. The biggest culprits? Desserts,

sweets, and dairy.

Those with food sensitivities, particularly lactose intolerance and allergies, were more likely to report nightmares and disturbing dreams, often linked to uncomfortable digestive symptoms like bloating and cramping. These gastrointestinal issues can disrupt sleep and trigger vivid, unsettling dreams.

How Does This Work? The Gut-Brain-Dream Connection

Dr. Tore Nielsen, one of the study's lead researchers, explains: “Nightmares are worse for lactose intolerant people who suffer severe gastrointestinal symptoms and whose sleep is disrupted,” said Nielsen. “This makes sense, because we know that other bodily sensations can affect dreaming. Nightmares can be very disruptive, especially if they occur often, because they tend to awaken people from sleep in a dysphoric state. They might also produce sleep avoidance behaviors. Both symptoms can rob you of restful sleep.”

This fits into a growing body of research about the gut-brain axis, the biochemical signaling between your digestive system and your brain. Gut health isn't just about digestion; it's intimately tied to your mental health, mood, and now, apparently, your dreams.

What to Eat (and Avoid) for More Pleasant Dreams

Beyond specific foods, the timing and quality of your meals matter too. The study showed that:

1. **1 First, work on your eating patterns**, like listening to hunger cues and avoiding late-night eating, predicted more frequent and pleasant dream recall. While eating late at night or ignoring hunger signals, was linked to more nightmares and negatively toned dreams.
2. **2 Limit dairy intake in the evening if you're lactose intolerant or sensitive.** Lactose intolerance can cause gastrointestinal distress like bloating and cramps that disrupt sleep and trigger nightmares.
3. **3 Cut back on sweets and desserts, especially close to bedtime.** High sugar intake is associated with worse sleep quality and increased nightmares.
4. **4 Favor gut-friendly, anti-inflammatory foods.** Fermented foods (like yogurt with live cultures, kimchi, sauerkraut), fiber-rich fruits, vegetables, and whole grains support a healthy gut microbiome, which plays a role in mental well-being and sleep quality via the gut-brain axis.
5. **5 Avoid heavy, spicy, or greasy meals late in the evening.** These can cause discomfort or indigestion, potentially disturbing sleep and dream quality.
6. **6 Try herbal teas with calming properties** such as chamomile or valerian root before bed, which may help promote relaxation and better sleep.
7. **7 Space your last meal at least 2-3 hours before bedtime.** Eating too close to sleep can disrupt your natural circadian rhythm and digestion, increasing the risk of nightmares and poor sleep.
8. **8 Practice intuitive eating consistently throughout the day**, focusing on balanced meals that include protein, healthy fats, and complex carbs to stabilize blood sugar and prevent late-night cravings.

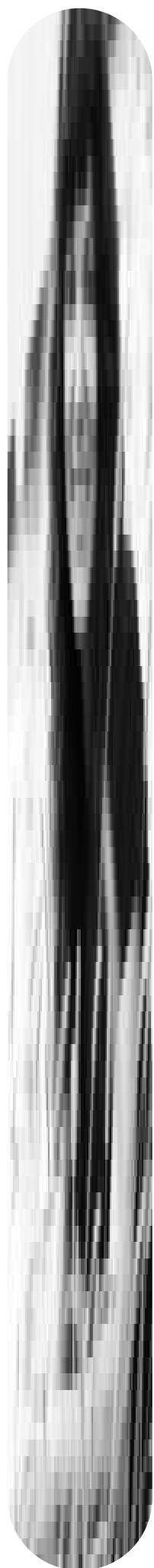
Sleep and Dreams: The Final Frontier for Longevity

Quality sleep is a cornerstone of healthy aging. Nightmares and poor sleep can increase stress, affect mood, and even impair memory and immune function. For the Super Age community, this emerging science offers fresh hope that lifestyle and diet

tweaks can promote not only longevity but also the joy of vivid, positive dreams.

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WRITTEN BY:



Heather Hurlock