**Could Your Diet Be Keeping You Awake?**

The various connections between what you eat and how you sleep are gaining attention. Research is showing that what you eat or don't eat can, in fact, affect your sleep. Here are some ideas as to how food affects your sleep, and what foods should be eaten or avoided to get a good night's sleep.

**Sleep and Weight Gain**

Multiple studies have shown that getting adequate, quality sleep may contribute to weight loss, and that not getting enough sleep may contribute to weight gain.

Interestingly, eating less did not help offset the weight gain associated with lack of sleep, according to a large-scale, long-term study on sleep and weight gain. This may be because lack of sleep may affect your metabolism, and when you don't get enough sleep, you produce the stress hormone cortisol, which is said to make you feel hungry.

**Stimulants**

Eating chocolate, sugar, refined grains, or drinking caffeine during the day and into the evening can have a stimulative effect that goes well into the night. For some people, artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives can disturb sleep. In addition, experts recommend that you also avoid the following foods, particularly in the evenings and/or right before bed:

\* **Alcohol** - Ironically, alcohol can disrupt your sleep patterns and make for poor sleep quality. Its diuretic effect (particularly beer) can also disrupt sleep.

\* **Excessively salty foods** - As the kidneys work to rid your body of the excess salt, you will probably find yourself getting up to go to the bathroom during the night.

\* **Tea, coffee, or cola** - The caffeine these drinks contain is not only a stimulant to your nervous system; it's been said to stimulate the kidneys, too.

\* **Spicy and/or greasy, fried foods** - These may cause heartburn.

**What Should You Eat?**

\* Magnesium-containing foods, such as almonds, seeds, black beans, salmon, dark leafy greens and most whole grains are helpful (although if beans give you uncomfortable gas, they should probably be avoided). Magnesium is crucial to muscle and nerve function, particularly muscle relaxation.

\* Whole grains and other complex carbohydrates may also promote sleep, as they are said to stimulate serotonin in the brain.

\* Plain, low-fat yogurt with raw honey makes a good bedtime snack. Raw honey is actually purported to promote sleep and even weight loss, while yogurt contains calcium, which is also important to muscle relaxation. Calcium also helps with melatonin production in the body.

\* Low-fat cheese can also help promote sleep. Whole grain pasta with a little Parmesan, for example, may be a good night-time meal.