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## FOOD & DRINK

# A Late-Night Snack to Help You Snooze?

More foods are pitching themselves as healthier night fare, and some even suggest they can help you sleep



PHOTO: MARK MATCHO

By *Anne Marie Chaker*

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**Victor Capo** just spent \$200 on 35 pints of ice cream that he thinks help him sleep. “I top my day off with this, brush my teeth, and I’m done,” he says.

Mr. Capo, a 37-year-old technical writer in Miami, ordered a brand called Nightfood. With ingredients such as magnesium and glycine that the brand calls “sleep friendly,” the ice cream touts itself as “sleep expert and cravemonster approved.” Many people consume ice cream at night anyway, says brand founder Sean Folkson, and are looking for an option that won’t hurt their sleep.

It’s part of a small but growing number of products marketed explicitly for pre-bedtime snacking. While conventional wisdom has long held that chowing down too close to bedtime

can disrupt sleep, these products are positioning themselves as better-for-you options, with some going further to suggest they can even help you get a better night's rest.

Nightfood's website features sleep and nutrition experts, and says the product has "removed/minimized stuff that's in most other ice creams that can be sleep disruptive," such as sugar and fat. Coming in flavors such as Cookies and Dreams and After Dinner Mint Chip, its \$5 containers are priced comparably to other low-calorie ice creams such as Enlightened, Halo Top, and Scandal-less, as well as Ben & Jerry's, which ranged in price from \$4.99 to \$5.69 at Safeway in Silver Spring, Md. It's available online and in more than 200 stores in 16 states after a February launch. "It was one of those late night orders from the darkness of my bedroom when nobody's looking," says Mr. Capo of his 35-pint splurge.



Nightfood ice cream comes in flavors such as Full Moon Vanilla. PHOTO: NIGHTFOOD

"drink 30 minutes before you are ready to sleep." Good Day chocolates contain 1 milligram of melatonin; a panel on the box offers a 1 to 4 chocolate dosing scale, from one candy ("maybe enough?") to four chocolates ("out like a light").

The products attempt to tap two consumer trends: the increasing move toward snacking rather than meals, and a frustration with poor sleep, marketing analysts say. Forty percent of consumers said they snacked in the late evening hours, according to Chicago market-research firm IRI's Snacking Survey of 1,025 consumers performed in February, up from 24% in 2010. "Sleep-friendly" foods aren't yet a big enough category to be tracked.

Nestlé is testing a rollout of a new chocolate called Goodnight whose packaging bills it as a "bedtime snack": "Enjoy a full serving of three delicately delicious Goodnight pieces 30-45 minutes before you'd like to drift off to dreamland." It's available on Amazon now, and the company expects to launch it on store shelves in some U.S. markets by fall.

Som Sleep drinks contain melatonin, an ingredient in over-the-counter sleep aids, alongside other ingredients such as Vitamin B6 and magnesium. Cans say to

Michael Harris, a 39-year-old financial investor in Wichita, Kan., typically has a Som Sleep drink about 30 minutes before bedtime, about three times a week. Sometimes he even packs it in his luggage before traveling. “It helps the quality of my sleep, and the depth,” he says. While he says he is generally averse to taking supplements, a cold drink seems more enticing. “It’s a preferential delivery method,” he says.

Doctors say there is truth in the common belief that eating too close to bedtime can harm the quality of your sleep. Certain fatty foods and big, heavy meals can take longer to digest, disrupting sleep, says Alon Avidan, director of the UCLA Sleep Disorders Center. Sugars and chocolate, he adds, can cause a spike in energy.

Research on the ingredients that are often touted as sleep helpers is mixed. Melatonin, for instance, is a hormone that suppresses an alerting function in our brains that can make us wake up, says Dr. Avidan. He says while a doctor may recommend it in particular cases related to sleep abnormalities, most people don’t need to take more of it. “If you don’t have a sleep problem, you don’t need to take melatonin,” says Dr. Avidan.

Other purported sleep aids include magnesium and glycine, but studies have generally been small or inconclusive, says Mark Moyad, a director of complementary and alternative medicine at the University of Michigan Medical Center. For instance, he says magnesium is often touted as a treatment for nocturnal leg cramps. But a 2014 review of seven studies concluded that it doesn’t generally appear to be effective in treatment.



Good Day Chocolates contain 1 milligram of melatonin per piece and can be found in hotels, drugstores and grocery chains.  
PHOTO: GOOD DAY CHOCOLATE

Makers of bedtime snack products say that they welcome more research, but that many consumers already find the products helpful. “We’ve seen very positive effects from consumers,” says Abdul Khan, founder of Som Sleep.

Roughly one-third of the adult population gets less than the recommended seven hours of sleep per night, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But food companies say that many people are reluctant to swallow a pill for sleep: Only 18% of troubled sleepers—defined as adults who have trouble sleeping at least once a week—said an over-the-counter sleep aid was their preferred way of dealing with sleep problems, according to a survey of 1,668 troubled sleepers from Packaged Facts.

“There’s a huge white space,” says Doug Munk, a director of new business ventures at Nestlé SA. “Most of the solutions you see in store are supplements or medicine. Food as medicine is

the trend we see.”

A serving of Nestlé’s Goodnight chocolates contains 70 milligrams of magnesium and 5 milligrams of casein protein, a slowly digested protein. Instructions say to “enjoy a full serving of three delicately delicious Goodnight pieces 30-45 minutes before you’d like to drift off to dreamland.” Social-media marketing has focused on segments including “worriers” (new parents, those with new jobs) and “sleep enthusiasts.”

Food companies toe a line in communicating benefits. A Food and Drug Administration spokesman declined to comment on a specific company’s marketing claims but said: “As a general rule we require food labeling to be truthful and not misleading and consider product labeling on a case-by-case basis.”

Nightfood’s website notes: “Nightfood does not contain sleep-aid substances or drugs, and it’s not a dietary supplement.” It adds that it is not suggesting that people eat ice cream as a sleep aid.

Instead, pint covers instruct consumers to “turn on TV, grab spoon, do your thing, sweet dreams!” Consumers say they link that to a better night’s sleep. “For an entire week, every night I ate a pint of ice cream,” says Mr. Capo, “and I went to sleep like it was nothing.”

**Write to Anne Marie Chaker at [anne-marie.chaker@wsj.com](mailto:anne-marie.chaker@wsj.com)**

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What do you snack on before bed? How does it affect your sleep?

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