Can magnesium help you sleep better at night?

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[00:00:09] **James Rowe:** Can magnesium really help you sleep better at night? Let's find out on this podcast from which, hello, I'm James Rowe, and on this special podcast series focusing on health and wellbeing, we're gonna give you expert advice and recommendations to help you live your best life every day. Join me on this second episode of the series.

[00:00:31] **James Rowe:** They Are Both Back Sha Lost Public health nutritionist here at which Shefa, hello.

[00:00:35] **Shefalee Loth:** Hi. Nice to see you again.

[00:00:36] **James Rowe:** Likewise. And the founder of City Dietician. Sophie. Madeline. Sophie, how are you?

[00:00:41] **Sophie Medlin:** Hi, I'm well, thank you.

[00:00:43] **James Rowe:** Very good. Now, this episode is all about magnesium. Can we just clarify what it actually is?

[00:00:50] **James Rowe:** Because I guess for some people it might just be an element on the periodic table, but for us today, it's a bit different. What's the background of it?

[00:00:59] **Sophie Medlin:** Magnesium is a really essential nutrient. It's a mineral that we need. So if you think of it being like iron and calcium and other minerals that we have in the diet, it's really essential for so many different bodily functions.

[00:01:10] **Sophie Medlin:** Far too many dimension. Hundreds of bodily functions rely on magnesium, things like neurotransmitters. So our brain chemistry being correct relies on magnesium, muscle relaxation and muscle contractions, the heart beating, and all of these things. Magnesium is really essential for all of these bodily functions, so it's something for all of us to be aware of in our diets.

[00:01:28] **James Rowe:** So there's a lot of health claim, authorized health claims actually for magnesium. It almost seems like it's a superhero. It can do a lot of things, or there's claim that it can do a lot of things. I guess that is almost music to a lot of people's ears that it can almost fight a lot of things or help you do a lot of things.

[00:01:49] **James Rowe:** Can you see why a lot of people are, you know, turning their eyes to magnesium a lot more now?

[00:01:55] **Sophie Medlin:** I think because it has so many different functions in the body and because also we'll get into this, but a lot of people don't get enough of it in their diet. It's sort of a marketer's dream magnesium because it becomes something that people actually often do feel better if they supplement with it because maybe they were a bit low in it before, and then they do start to notice the benefit.

[00:02:13] **Sophie Medlin:** And so actually I can see why people are so interested in it from a supplement manufacturer's perspective, but also there is reason for the general public to be interested in it too.

[00:02:21] **James Rowe:** And I mentioned this in the in intro, didn't I? About whether or not it could help you sleep better at night. This is kind of one of the big health claims around it, isn't it?

[00:02:30] **James Rowe:** That you should take this supplement maybe at night just before you go to bed and it could help you sleep. What's the signs behind this? What do we actually know?

[00:02:40] **Shefalee Loth:** So actually, there isn't an authorized health claim regarding magnesium and sleep

[00:02:44] **James Rowe:** Should say the Olga's not a claim. It is claimed by a lot of people, is the fair to say?

[00:02:49] **James Rowe:** That's exactly it. Yeah. But there's a difference there, isn't there?

[00:02:51] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah. If you look on social media or you are on social media, you'll have been bombarded by adverts for magnesium supplements that can help you sleep better. They can help your muscles and post, you know, relax after exercise, et cetera.

[00:03:07] **Shefalee Loth:** There's a lot of claims, but actually if we focus on the sleep aspect, um, magnesium is really important. In our nervous system, but also our muscle function. So actually it can help. We think that's where the sleep aspect comes from. It helps your muscles relax. It also helps your nervous system relax. So actually both of those are key when you're going to sleep.

[00:03:29] **Shefalee Loth:** At night. So that's where that claim comes from.

[00:03:32] **James Rowe:** So it's almost like as if it's a byproduct of a, an actual authorized health claim that it actually has.

[00:03:39] **Shefalee Loth:** That's right. Yeah. And you'll find lots of people take magnesium to help them sleep.

[00:03:44] **James Rowe:** And in terms of the different types of magnesium, is there a particular type that may benefit you in, in this sort of area?

[00:03:54] **Sophie Medlin:** There is claims on, on websites and things like that from, from supplement providers and elsewhere that different forms of magnesium, magnesium glycinate, magnesium malate, for example, are better for sleep or muscle relaxation or whatever it might be. In reality, when we look at the, the health claims, all magnesium's grouped in together, so from our perspective and from a sort of.

[00:04:14] **Sophie Medlin:** That the bulk of scientific evidence around this, we would say that magnesium is much of a muchness, and as long as you're choosing one that's highly bioavailable, you can use it in your body, then you'll be fine.

[00:04:24] **James Rowe:** We should say as well, actually on series one of this podcast, we did a full episode on sleep tips to help you get a better night's sleep.

[00:04:30] **James Rowe:** We'll pop a link in the show notes if you wanna go back and listen to that. But sticking with magnesium, you, Sophie mentioned a little bit earlier on about how a lot of us should potentially be taking a supplement of this. How can we spot if we're actually deficient and we should be taking it? What? Are there some obvious warning signs?

[00:04:51] **Sophie Medlin:** Well, I think more so we should look at the data, which will give us a bit more of an accurate representation or a bit more of a generalized representation perhaps, of what's going on. There's a survey called the NDNS, the National Diet and Nutrition Survey, which looks at many, many people's diets across the country.

[00:05:06] **Sophie Medlin:** And what we know from the most recent data from that is that many people are not reaching their requirements for magnesium every day. And unfortunately that's partly because it's in lots of whole foods, beans and pulses, lentils, seeds in things like nuts and other foods, green leafy vegetables, things that we're perhaps not getting enough of day to day.

[00:05:26] **Sophie Medlin:** That deficiency or that dietary lack of magnesium spans across almost every age group. So from teenage girls and and teenagers all the way up until the elderly. So there's lots and lots of people that have a dietary shortfall in magnesium. The other aspect of this is that certain lifestyle factors use up more magnesium in the body.

[00:05:45] **Sophie Medlin:** So first of all, people are not getting enough a population level, but then also lifestyle factors like too much stress, coffee. Alcohol, exercise, lots of these common lifestyle factors mean that we use up more magnesium in the body or excrete more magnesium in our urine. And so we can end up in a situation where we're not only just not getting enough, but we're also using more than we were.

[00:06:06] **Sophie Medlin:** And that's where people can really benefit from a supplement or really focusing in their diet on, on higher sources of magnesium. I'm

[00:06:13] **James Rowe:** listening to that list of things, so. Coffee. I guess a lot of us have that, you know, in the morning. Yeah. Alcohol. Maybe Friday night you're having a, a glass of wine or something.

[00:06:21] **James Rowe:** Exercise. I'm presuming you're just talking about doing exercise rather than lack of it. Yeah, absolutely. Maybe you do the park run on a Saturday morning and there, you know, there it goes again. Stress. A lot of us do lead busy lives and we're getting a bit more stressed so it shows that, you know, a lot of us are probably very deficient.

[00:06:35] **James Rowe:** Is that fair to say? Isn't it? Yeah. Or

[00:06:36] **Sophie Medlin:** at least sort of borderline deficient in that range where supplementation may well have some benefits and I think that that. Sort of perfect storm in a way is what's made magnesium supplements really boom. Because not only are the companies hooking into this, but also people take them and they say, wow, I felt so much better.

[00:06:53] **Sophie Medlin:** And they tell their friends and they pass the message on.

[00:06:55] **James Rowe:** And you mentioned about diet. Hmm. We shouldn't be jumping straight from magnesium supplements, should we? Should we actually be, first of all, looking at our diet and thinking, how can I improve my diet to then get more magnesium in a more natural way?

[00:07:12] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah, I guess we would always say diet first. Um, so. If you can include more green leafy veg into your diet, more whole grains, more nuts and seeds. Those are all foods that will be providing magnesium. There's also avocados and fish. Um, have I forgotten anything else?

[00:07:32] **Sophie Medlin:** Bananas. Dark chocolate there. Yeah, there you go.

[00:07:34] **Shefalee Loth:** So there's lots of. Food sources for magnesium in the brain than adult? Yeah, there are a lot, but also I think it's important to say that for some people, um, as you get older, you might not absorb as much. Um, if you have malabsorption issues such as celiac disease or Crohn's, then actually that can affect how much you absorb as well from your diet.

[00:07:57] **Shefalee Loth:** So in situations like that. Then supplementation can be useful as well.

[00:08:01] **James Rowe:** Yeah. So that's, that's a a an interesting point that we should try and reiterate. Then there are certain groups of people, mm-hmm. As you just mentioned, where possibly trying to get enough magnesium through your diet isn't actually possible.

[00:08:13] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah. You might be getting it, but you might not be absorbing it.

[00:08:18] **James Rowe:** And for the general public then, as we sort of touched on there, we might not be getting enough. Are there some very obvious signs, even if we don't just consider, oh, well yeah, I do drink some alcohol. I do drink too much coffee. You know, are we gonna feel maybe like lethargic or something?

[00:08:32] **James Rowe:** Is there a very obvious sign or is it quite difficult?

[00:08:35] **Sophie Medlin:** Unlike. Iron deficiency, for example, where we can say, yes, you'll be short of breath if you're iron deficient and you'll be really tired. Magnesium is more of those sort of grumbling background symptoms, like perhaps not sleeping as well, feeling more stressed and anxious, muscles not recovering as well after exercise.

[00:08:50] **Sophie Medlin:** These sorts of things which are really nondescript and also. Aren't something that you can really hang your hat on and say it's definitely magnesium deficiency. And for that reason, I think again, it becomes really useful as a marketing tool because all of these things that everyone experiences could be magnesium deficiency.

[00:09:05] **Sophie Medlin:** But I think it is one of those things that's much more difficult to to clearly describe and say for sure that something's magnesium deficiency.

[00:09:12] **James Rowe:** And then on the flip side then we touched on people who will possibly benefit more than others from taking a supplement. What about those who we may advise not to take a magnesium supplement at all?

[00:09:24] **James Rowe:** I'm presuming there are certain groups of people who should sort of be a bit wary.

[00:09:28] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah. As with any kind of supplement, they're not risk free. And so we touched on this in the last episode. If you are taking any prescription medication, then do check with your gp, your pharmacist, or even a dietician. Uh.

[00:09:44] **Shefalee Loth:** About mixing supplements with over, you know, medication because they can affect how well it your medication works with magnesium. I think people who have kidney issues perhaps shouldn't take supplements or maybe want to check with their doctor before they do start. And then there's another group of people who may have IBS symptoms, so irritable bowel syndrome.

[00:10:07] **Shefalee Loth:** And there are certain forms of magnesium, which I'm sure we'll touch upon when we talk about. The types of magnesium supplement, some forms of magnesium can irritate or exacerbate diarrhea symptoms and cause diarrhea. So actually, if you're someone who has IBS, you probably don't want to take that form of magnesium.

[00:10:27] **Sophie Medlin:** And ironically, diarrhea can cause magnesium deficiency. So you're taking more magnesium in the wrong form, getting more diarrhea, losing more magnesium, and then that can become a bit of a vicious cycle for people

[00:10:37] **James Rowe:** on a day to day. Basis, or at least sort of over the last year or so in your day-to-day job, have you seen more people asking you about magnesium?

[00:10:46] **Sophie Medlin:** Yeah, all the time. It's everywhere. And most people I would say that I see, and bear in mind it's a a fairly affluent population that I'm looking after. Most people are taking some form of magnesium now, really, which is new in the last year or so, I would say. Yeah.

[00:10:59] **James Rowe:** And do you put this down to kind of, you know, this boom around vitamins and supplements and people almost feel like they need it almost feels a bit like a trend.

[00:11:08] **James Rowe:** Yeah. Although it shouldn't be, but I guess people are sort of wanting to. Hop on board. Is that fair? Say? Yeah.

[00:11:13] **Sophie Medlin:** I think that every year, all the time there's something new that comes on the market that people, it sort of focuses everyone's attention in on that particular thing. And at the moment it's magnesium and, and you know, in the next couple of weeks it'll probably be something else, but it's, at the moment, it's a big thing.

[00:11:26] **Sophie Medlin:** And I think because it does make a big difference to some people, and there is some evidence that we need it, I, you know, it's, it's a valid thing to be focusing on for now, I suppose.

[00:11:34] **James Rowe:** Well, we'll be getting into our reviews again, we've had these under the microscope, haven't we? A little bit recently. We'll be touching on that a little bit later on for our members.

[00:11:42] **James Rowe:** But for, for some general advice, uh, how much magnesium should we be taking? I imagine there's a lot of supplements with higher doses or lower doses. General advice. How much should we be taking?

[00:11:54] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah, so the reference nutrient intake for magnesium is. 375 milligrams a day. Um, and actually the NHS says that really you should try to avoid taking over 400 milligrams a day because a high dose can cause diarrhea.

[00:12:12] **James Rowe:** And again, for some more general advice for when people are in the supermarket or in a pharmacy or chemist, what should they look for on the shelf? You know, there's gonna be. A lot of brands out there, there's gonna be a lot of different, I guess different types of magnesium. Mm-hmm. Just generally as this booms, what should people be looking for?

[00:12:32] **James Rowe:** I feel like a lot of people would be overwhelmed looking at the amount of products on the shelf.

[00:12:35] **Sophie Medlin:** Yeah. I think a key thing to say is that it's specifically magnesium citrate that causes diarrhea. Okay, so for most people, you want to avoid a magnesium citrate supplement for, for obvious reasons, but also because it can cause magnesium deficiency in itself.

[00:12:50] **Sophie Medlin:** The other thing to be aware of is that if you're taking magnesium, sometimes it can make you feel quite thirsty. I would say anecdotally from patients, you're not drinking enough water. People can wake up feeling quite hungover when they take magnesium. Oh, really? Yeah. So you don't necessarily want to start specifically with the highest dose.

[00:13:05] **Sophie Medlin:** You want to think about starting with a slightly lower dose and maybe building up a little bit or seeing how you land if you've taken that for a little while. So I would say it's not about the highest dose, it's about maybe sidestepping the magnesium citrate. Other forms of magnesium are more bioavailable, and we'll get into that in a minute.

[00:13:20] **Sophie Medlin:** But it's also one of those supplements where if it's only a single ingredient supplement, you probably also don't want loads of bulking agents and fillers in there, right? There's, and they're not necessary in the same sort of way as they can be in other products. So you want something that's relatively low in bulking agents and fillers, not magnesium citrate, ideally magnesium glycinate or bis glycinate, which is really well absorbed.

[00:13:41] **Sophie Medlin:** That's the main thing to look for really.

[00:13:43] **James Rowe:** It's interesting that Sophie mentions the, the sort of side effects of if you're not drinking enough water alongside supplements for you, I guess does this almost hammer the point home about if you are taking vitamins and supplements, this should be alongside a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle?

[00:13:59] **James Rowe:** You know, drinking enough, enough water is almost a, a basic, and I guess a lot of people don't actually drink enough water, so you should be drinking enough water alongside them taking supplements.

[00:14:10] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah, and also it's about. You know, fitting them into your daily, um, routine. So, for example, I started taking magnesium supplements for sleep to see if I, it would help my sleep.

[00:14:23] **Shefalee Loth:** But actually, and I've told Sophie this, it gave, they gave me really vivid dreams. Oh, really? And I looked it up. Afterwards online, and loads of other people reported having this too. So Sophie advised me to perhaps halve my dose, but also take it earlier on in the daytime. And since she's done that, I'm not taking it because it doesn't fit my routine.

[00:14:44] **Shefalee Loth:** So I just think. If you are spending money on supplements, it's really important you work out how they're gonna fit into your daily routine, because actually the most important thing is you take them regularly.

[00:14:55] **James Rowe:** Well, I think this is the perfect time for us to talk about some of the very best magnesium supplements on the market.

[00:15:02] **James Rowe:** We've had them under the microscope. Now. This section is exclusively available to our witch members, so if you are already a member. There is a link in the show notes for you to click and you can head right through and listen right now. If you are not a member already, don't worry. You can get 50% off the first year of a witch membership by going to witch co uk slash podcast offer.

[00:15:23] **James Rowe:** But for now, she Thanks very much.

[00:15:25] **Shefalee Loth:** Thank you.

[00:15:25] **James Rowe:** And Sophie, thank you. Thank you.

[00:15:37] **James Rowe:** That brings to an end another podcast from which there's load. More for you to read about everything we discussed today. Just head to the episode description for more useful everyday advice. There you'll also find an exclusive offer for podcast listeners like you to become a which member for 50% off the usual price, giving you access to our product reviews, our app, one-to-one, personalized buying advice, and every issue of which magazine across the air.

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[00:16:19] **James Rowe:** Goodbye.