How to Reset Your Circadian Rhythm in Seven Days

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Reset your body clock in seven days with a fixed wake time, morning outdoor light, dim warm evenings, and small fifteen-to-thirty-minute steps instead of forced early bedtimes.

Things you will need

- Two alarms, with one placed across the room
- Blackout curtains or a contoured sleep mask
- Dimmable warm-white bedside lamp
- Smart plug or mechanical lamp timer
- Foam earplugs or a small white-noise fan
- Sunglasses for a bright drive home
- Kitchen timer for the 20-minute nap
- Outdoor shoes and a jacket by the door
- Index card and pencil for the seven-day log
- Phone charger mounted out of arm's reach
- Decaffeinated tea for the evening wind-down
- Paper book and a low reading light
- Loose, cool bedding you can swap quickly
- Refillable water bottle for the morning walk

Days 1-2: Set the Anchor, Then Move Bedtime in Small Steps

1. **Pick One Wake Time and Hold It**
   Your wake time is the anchor, because the body clock sets itself largely from when you get up and get light rather than from when you climb into bed.
2. **Get Outside Within the First Hour Awake**
   Take 15 to 30 minutes outdoors within an hour of waking: a walk around the block, coffee on a step or balcony, or standing at an open window while you eat.
3. **Move Bedtime in Fifteen-to-Thirty-Minute Steps**
   If you currently fall asleep around 2 in the morning and want midnight, do not go to bed two hours early tonight.
4. **Keep Mornings Bright, Noisy, and Early**
   Give the first 30 minutes of the day light, sound, movement, and food at roughly the same hour.
5. **Put Exercise Earlier in the Day**
   Aim for 20 to 45 minutes of brisk movement on most days and put the harder session in the morning or afternoon rather than the last hour before bed.

Days 3-4: Build the Evening Slope Toward Bed

6. **Dim the House Three Hours Before Bed**
   Two to three hours before your target bedtime, turn the ceiling lights off and work by one or two low, warm lamps.

7. **Set an Early Caffeine Cutoff and Write It Down**

   Choose a conservative cutoff and record it: nothing containing caffeine within roughly eight hours of your target bedtime, which for a midnight bedtime means the last coffee in the mid-morning.

8. **Count Alcohol as a Nighttime Disrupter**

   Alcohol can make you drowsy at first, but it tends to fragment the second half of the night, and because it relaxes the throat it can worsen snoring and breathing interruptions in people prone to them.

9. **Turn Screens Down and Move Them Away**

   For the last hour, put the phone on its charger out of arm's reach, drop any screen you truly need to its dimmest setting, and hold it at or below chest height rather than propped up above your face in a dark room.

10. **Run the Same Forty-Minute Wind-Down**

    Make the last 30 to 40 minutes before bed the same sequence every night: a small snack if you are genuinely hungry, a warm shower, teeth and skincare, then a paper book or quiet music under a low lamp in a cool, dark room.

Days 5-7: Hold the Schedule Through Weekends, Travel, and Shifts

11. **Cap Weekend Drift at Two Hours**

    The usual way this week collapses is a three-hour lie-in on Saturday, which pushes the clock back toward where it started and makes Monday morning feel like jet lag.

12. **Shift Earlier After Eastward Trips, Later After Westward Ones**

    Eastward travel forces your clock earlier, the direction most people find harder, so begin two or three days before departure by moving bedtime and wake time 15 to 30 minutes earlier each day, then take strong morning light at the destination and keep evenings dim.

13. **Protect One Anchor Sleep Block for Night Shifts**

    If you work nights or rotate, do not flip your whole schedule on every day off; keep one protected sleep block that happens on work days and days off alike, often about four hours in the middle of your main sleep period, and treat that block as your anchor instead of a wake time.

14. **Nap Short and Early or Skip It**

    A 20-minute nap before mid-afternoon can lift alertness without much affecting night sleep, while a nap at 5 in the evening often does the opposite.

15. **Set the Bedroom Dark, Quiet, and Cool**

    Make the room dark enough that you cannot see the walls from bed, quiet enough that ordinary house noise does not pull you up, and cooler than your daytime rooms, with many people finding somewhere around 65 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit comfortable.

Track the Week, Recover From Bad Nights, and Read the Red Flags

16. **Keep a Seven-Day Log on One Card**

    Track seven things a day on one card at the bedside: when you got into bed, roughly when you think you fell asleep, when you woke, when your feet were outdoors, the hour of your last caffeine, how many times you woke in the night, and a one-to-five score for morning alertness.

17. **Read the Week Before Changing Anything**

    At the end of day seven, judge averages rather than the worst night.

18. Recover From One Bad Night Without Doubling It

After a night when you barely slept, get up at the anchor time, get your outdoor light, and eat breakfast as usual, because those two moves do more for tonight than any amount of guilt about yesterday.

19. Recognize the Warning Signs of Sleep Apnea

Stop treating snoring as normal if it comes with gasping, choking, or pauses in breathing that someone else can see, if you wake with a headache or a parched mouth, if a full night leaves you unrefreshed, or if you nod off during quiet daytime activities.

20. Escalate Insomnia or Low Mood to a Clinician

See a clinician instead of continuing this protocol alone if trouble falling or staying asleep has lasted at least three nights a week for three months, if you still feel wrecked in daytime after several weeks of good timing, or if any red flag appears earlier.

Sources

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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/Reset-Your-Circadian-Rhythm. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/co