

4 Week Sleep Challenge!

If you answer YES to any of the following questions, you would benefit from taking our challenge.

- Do you have a difficult time falling asleep or staying asleep?
- Are you driving drowsy, or do you tend to nod off while doing sedentary activities like watching TV or working on the computer?
- Do you spend more hours sleeping on the weekend or days off compared to the amount of time you sleep during your workweek?

Taking the time to improve your sleep can have numerous positive benefits! Common questions we are asked as sleep specialist, include “How Much Sleep Do I Need?” and “What is My Natural Circadian Rhythm?” Print out the following pages and track your sleep to help answer those questions. Concentrate on the directions given for that particular week.

[Your effort will pay off as Better Sleep = Better Life.](#)

| Week 1 | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fall asleep | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Wake up | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Nap (time and length) | | | | | |
| Total time sleeping | | | | | |

START BY COLLECTING DATA ON YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

- Keep a daily record of what time you fall asleep and what time you get out of bed to start your day
- Take your “best guess” as exact times are not important
- “Clock watching” leads to mental math that increases arousal, so avoid looking at the time if you wake, turn your clock around or cover it up
- Do not keep this sleep challenge in your bedroom. Instead, keep it in the kitchen and fill it out while eating breakfast or drinking coffee

IMPROVE THE BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Make your bedroom dark, quiet and cool. Use an eye mask, ear plugs or a fan if necessary
- Consider sleeping separately from your bed partner if they disrupt your sleep and keeping pets out of the bedroom
- Remove electronics from your bedroom: TV, laptop and smartphone. If you have to wake up at a set time, it is better to purchase an alarm clock

START BY COLLECTING DATA ON YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

- Slowly cut back on caffeine intake to no more than 1-2 servings a day before noon, especially if you have trouble falling asleep, wake frequently or are awake for long in the middle of the night
- Stop or cut back on substance use, as they can disrupt sleep. This includes tobacco and alcohol, plan for no use 3-4 hours before bed.
Avoid eating a large meal before bed, as this sends signals to the brain that it is time to be awake
- For many exercising in the evening can make it difficult to fall asleep, so get activity earlier in the day
- Many medications can affect your sleep or make you sleepy during the day, so check into possible side effects and talk to your healthcare provider
- Discomfort due to pain or positioning can be a factor, treat underlying conditions
- Obtain a new bed if needed, it does not have to be costly
- Do you feel stressed about your sleep, or find it easy to fall asleep on the couch but difficult to sleep when you get to bed? Following the tips in the weeks to come can help

| Week 2 | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fall asleep | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Wake up | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Nap (time and length) | | | | | |
| Total time sleeping | | | | | |

IDENTIFY TROUBLE SPOTS

- If you identified many habits/items that needed change in Week 1, tackle them one at a time. Too much change at once can be overwhelming

- If you are sleepy during the day – this may mean you did not allow enough time for sleep. Most adults need 7 or more hours of sleep in a 24-hour period on a consistent basis, to feel rested. Very few of us can get by on less sleep
- If you have trouble falling asleep or getting back to sleep in the middle of the night – avoid napping and spending more than 7 hours in bed per day. Set an alarm for the same time every morning, even if you have nothing planned. Get out of bed if you think you have been awake for longer than 15-20 minutes and do something relaxing. When you feel drowsy, go back to bed. Don't eat in the middle of the night, or use drugs/substances
- Naps can be great, keep them short! Sometimes naps can be a sign of a sleep disorder. If they affect your ability to sleep at night, avoid them
- If others report you stop breathing at night, or if you wake due to snorting/gasping, leg discomfort, or acting out dreams, see a healthcare provider for evaluation of a possible sleep disorder

FOLLOW A SET SCHEDULE

- Going to bed at the same time and wake up at the same time this week. This is an important step in figuring out your natural sleep pattern. Start by picking a wake time you can stick to every day, even on the weekend
- Go to bed only when drowsy
- Wind down – for at least an hour or two before you plan to go to sleep, it is important to send signals to your mind/body that it is time to get ready for bed. Some ideas include putting on comfortable clothes, turning off electronics, reading something relaxing, taking a bath, drinking something warm like caffeine-free tea. Avoid work-related activities, watching the news or talking to family members about touchy subjects at this time of night
- Rise Up – Get up when your alarm goes off, rather than using the snooze alarm. Engage in behavior that signals the start of the day. Stretch or exercise right away. Get in the shower. Get dressed, make your bed. Get outside into the morning air and sun if you can.

| Week 3 | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fall asleep | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Wake up | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Nap (time and length) | | | | | |
| Total time sleeping | | | | | |

ARE YOU A NIGHT OWL, MORNING LARK OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN?

- Benefits of finding your circadian (biological) rhythm include more energy and less risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and mental health disorders
- Paying attention to what hours you sleep on the weekends or when you are off work/school for an extended time, can be a helpful clue to your natural sleep/wake cycle as you will likely drift towards this timing when you do not have other responsibilities
- Note: your biologic pattern may be different than others in your household. It may not be in line with your current work or school schedule
- Behavior and routine are key! If you have not rid yourself of bad habits or addressed issues that may be affecting your sleep (see Week 1&2), you may have trouble identifying your circadian rhythm

FINE TUNING YOUR CLOCK

Now that you are following a routine sleep schedule, note the best time of day (morning, midmorning, afternoon, evening, or late evening) for the following:

- Cognitive tasks like doing math or concentrating on things
- Feeling energetic or lively (note: this could be a good time to exercise)
- Eating- is there a certain time of the day you take in most of your calories? You may need to experiment with moving this to different times, notice if your body feels refreshed or sluggish after a meal
- Is there a certain time of day you feel sleepy, or your brain slows down? This is a good time to take a break. Don't use your phone. Instead, stretch your legs, let your mind wander, get a drink of water, or take a short nap

SLOW GENTLE CORRECTION

Based on the information you gathered above, start to adjust your daytime behavior and sleep schedule to accommodate your natural sleep/wake cycle

- For instance, gradually move most of your calorie consumption to the time of day you feel most hungry. Avoid eating too close to bedtime
- If needed, rearrange responsibilities (work/school hours) to accommodate your sleep/wake cycle
- The strongest tool for setting your clock. Increase your exposure to natural or artificial bright light in the morning (1/2 hr. walk 1st thing in AM). This sends a signal through the optic nerves in the eyes to the "master clock" in the brain.

Week 4

| Day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fall asleep | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Wake up | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm | am/pm |
| Nap (time and length) | | | | | |
| Total time sleeping | | | | | |

RELAXATION

- To set yourself up for success, remember to incorporate the good sleep habits and eliminate the sleep disruptors addressed in previous weeks
- Aim for work/life balance with minimal stress – manage your priorities and avoid being overscheduled, learn to say “no”
- Have quiet reflection time each day – look out a window, sit in your back yard, use meditation or guided imagery
- In addition to mental relaxation, physical relaxation techniques may be helpful such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, or tai chi
- Try music, recommended essential oils, or a soothing bath

EXERCISE AND DIET

- Move more and sit less. When you exercise, you sleep better and vice versa Get 20+ minutes of light to moderate exercise every day
- Eat a balanced diet with adequate servings of fruits/vegetables. Minimize carbohydrates, sugar, and processed foods

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Thank you for completing this 4-week sleep challenge!

If you had many challenges to overcome, it may take a few more weeks to see improvements in your daytime tiredness and ability to fall/stay asleep. If problems persist after trying these strategies, see a healthcare provider. They may have you see a sleep specialist who can fully assess and treat your sleep needs.

If you prefer to track your sleep with an app or online, check out [CBTi Coach](#), created by the VA Medical Center or the “Go! To Sleep Program” created by the [Cleveland Clinic](#) Wellness Program.