



CONCERN:EAP

Healthy & Resilient You

Dream a Little Dream of Sleep

Resetting Your
Circadian Clock



SLEEP. As far as physical health is concerned, it ranks in importance with eating, drinking, and, yes, even breathing. Despite this, healthy slumber is often missing from our daily routines. Have you ever traded a good night's rest to finish up that work project? How about to read *just one more* chapter in a book or to binge-watch a few more episodes in your favorite streaming series?

If so, you're not alone. But, considering the serious toll sleep deprivation can take on your body and mind, it might be time to make those Zs a bigger priority.

Here's a snapshot of what skimping on sleep looks like:

Short-Term Effects of Sleep Deprivation

- ↓ Decrease in mood, concentration, and productivity
- ↑ Increase in errors and accidents

Longer-Term Effects of Sleep Deprivation

- ↓ Decrease in immune and cognitive functioning
- ↑ Increase in risk of weight gain, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease

In the past, we've discussed **how we can increase our productivity by honoring our bodies' ultradian rhythms**, which regulate periods of alertness and fatigue. Similarly, if you're suffering from the effects of either short- or long-term sleep deprivation, it's probably time to pay attention to the rhythms of your circadian clock.

The Tick Tock of the Circadian Clock

We might like to believe we're the masters of our domain, able to set our body's schedule at our own discretion — an all-nighter here, a compensatory catnap there. Unfortunately, we don't have that much control, as the quality and timing of our sleep is largely the prerogative of our circadian clock, the body's internal timekeeper. Through the strategic regulation of the sleep hormone melatonin, the circadian clock signals to the body when to wake up and when to hit the hay.

The process looks something like this: When biological night approaches, the circadian timekeeper cues our brain to flood our bloodstream with yawn-inducing melatonin. With the break of morning light and increasing a.m. temperatures, the brain knows to dial back melatonin to gently wake us. At least, that's the sequence in healthy sleepers.



If you notice that it's hard for your body to ease into sleep at night and that you typically wake up in a fog, your melatonin cycles are likely out of sync with your daily schedule. This is a common issue, as modern "nighttime" in the age of electric lights and gadgets rarely mirrors the biological nighttime set by the natural world. This misalignment can throw our bodies and minds for a loop.

The good news is that your circadian clock can be reset like a wristwatch and put back in sync. Only, instead of replacing a battery or rewinding some gears, rebooting your circadian rhythm entails making some behavioral changes to help return your body to a more natural equilibrium.

How to Go All Natural with Your Sleep

It took hundreds of thousands of years for our circadian clocks to adapt to our environments — and that physical conditioning isn't going away anytime soon. This conditioning also means that we can often develop healthier sleep patterns by taking a *return to nature* approach, such as:



Rewiring with a Weekend Away:

Take a cue from the early humans and become one with nature by surrounding yourself with it. If you can, take a weekend camping trip away *sans* electronics. Go to sleep when it gets dark, and rise with the sun to reset your natural clock.



Restart with a Staycation:

If camping just isn't your thing, you can simulate a weekend trip without leaving the comfort of your hometown, by:

- Getting outside a few days in a row for adequate daytime light exposure
- Limiting tech use during the day, tapering off in the afternoons, and unplugging electronics in the hours before sleep (when the body starts to churn out melatonin)
- Setting your bedtime earlier than usual, shortly after it gets dark

Recent sleep studies show that we can reset our circadian clocks by following this approach for as little as 2-3 days. Once you've performed a natural reset, there are plenty of other behavioral changes you can make to your routine to support more regular and restful sleep.



Nap Smart:

To reap the benefit of naps without interrupting your natural rhythms, try limiting them to 20 - 30 minutes or less.



Hop out of Bed:

If more than 20 minutes have elapsed since you've turned in and you can't fall asleep, get out of bed and do something relaxing, like meditating or drinking caffeine-free tea. But remember — no electronics.



Bedtime Best Practices:

Sometimes good sleep requires good preparation. That entails:

- Filtering out ambient noise with a white noise machine or fan
- Keeping your room cooled to around 67 or 68 degrees
- Avoiding afternoon caffeine
- Exercising regularly for a rest well-earned

For more tips and strategies to promote healthier sleep, visit the [Get Your ZZZs toolkit](#) in the CONCERN Resilience Hub™. First-time users may be asked to enter their company code.

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