

Sleep: How It Works and a Wind-Down Routine

The two systems that drive sleep, and a simple evening routine to fall asleep more easily. Educational overview and checklist.

Two systems drive sleep. Sleep pressure builds the longer you are awake, and the body clock sets when you feel sleepy or alert. Good sleep happens when both line up. Most sleep trouble improves by working with these systems, not by trying harder to sleep.

An evening wind-down checklist

- Keep a consistent wake time, even on weekends. It anchors the whole clock.
- Get bright light early in the day, and dim the lights in the evening.
- Cut caffeine after early afternoon, and go easy on late alcohol, which fragments sleep.
- Give yourself a calm wind-down hour: lower the lights, step away from screens, do something soothing.
- Keep the bed for sleep, so your brain links the bed with sleeping.
- If you are awake for more than about 20 minutes, get up and do something quiet, then return when sleepy.

If trouble sleeping lasts weeks and affects your days, talk with a clinician. Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is the first-line treatment and works well.

Learn more: [Sleep Hygiene at shrinkdaily.com/concept/sleep-hygiene](https://shrinkdaily.com/concept/sleep-hygiene)