

Dream a Little Dream of Sleep - Resetting Your Circadian Clock

夢一場好眠：重啟你的生理時鐘

Sleep. As physical health is concerned, it ranks in importance with eating, drinking, and, yes, even breathing. Despite this, we often sacrifice healthy slumber 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, accidents, and irritability

Longer-Term Effects of Sleep Deprivation

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

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. However, anxiety becomes problematic when it's habitually focused on things we can't control.

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. 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.

從身體健康的角度來看，睡眠的重要性不亞於飲食、喝水，甚至呼吸。儘管如此，我們經常犧牲睡眠來應付日常生活。你有沒有曾經為了完成工作項目而犧牲了應有的睡眠？亦或者只是想再多看幾頁書、再追幾集喜愛的影集而捨不得睡？

如果有過這樣的經驗，你並不孤單。但考慮到睡眠不足對身心造成的嚴重影響，也許現在是時候把睡眠放在更優先的位置了。以下是犧牲睡眠所帶來的影響：

睡眠不足的短期影響

- 情緒、專注力和生產力下降
- 錯誤率、意外事故和易怒情緒增加

睡眠不足的長期影響

- 免疫力和認知功能下降
- 體重增加、肥胖、糖尿病與心臟疾病的風險提高

如果你正在經歷短期或長期的睡眠匱乏帶來的影響，那麼也許該開始關注你的生理時鐘節奏了。不過，當焦慮習慣性地集中在我們無法控制的事情上時，它就成了真正的問題。

生理時鐘的運作機制

我們可能寧可相信自己是生活的主宰者，能隨心所欲地安排自己的作息。然而事實是，我們對自己的掌控力並沒有那麼大，因為睡眠的品質與時間主要是由我們體內的「生理時鐘」所主導。透過對褪黑激素這個睡眠荷爾蒙的巧妙調節，這個生理時鐘會指示我們的身體該何時清醒、何時入睡。

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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.

這個過程大致如下：當生理性的夜晚來臨時，生理時鐘會提示大腦釋放大量令人想打哈欠的褪黑激素進入血液。隨著早晨光線出現、氣溫上升，大腦則會減少褪黑激素的分泌，讓我們自然醒來。當然，在睡眠正常的人身上，流程是這樣進行的。

如果你發現自己難以在夜晚入睡，早上又總是在昏沉中醒來，那麼很可能是你的褪黑激素分泌週期與日常作息不同步。這是很常見的現象，因為現代社會中充滿電燈與電子產品的「夜晚」，早已不再反映自然界的真正夜晚。這種節奏錯位會讓身體與大腦陷入混亂。

好消息是，生理時鐘就像手錶一樣，可以重設並重新對齊。不同的是，重啟生理時鐘不是更換電池或轉動齒輪，而是要透過一系列行為上的改變來幫助身體回歸更自然的平衡狀態。

如何讓你的睡眠回歸自然

我們的生理時鐘花了數十萬年的時間才與環境相互適應——而這種身體的適應性並不會突然消失。這也意味著，透過回歸自然的方式，我們可以重新建立更健康的睡眠模式，例如：

週末旅行，讓身心重新接軌自然

效法早期人類的作息，與自然融為一體。若有機會，不妨利用一個週末安排一次遠離電子設備的旅遊。當天黑就入睡，天亮就起床，讓你的身體重新同步於自然節奏。

在家也能重啟生理時鐘

如果露營不是你的風格，也可以選擇在家中模擬週末旅行的效果，例如：

- 連續幾天多到戶外走走，接受充足的日間自然光照
- 白天減少電子產品使用時間，下午開始漸漸減量，睡前幾小時完全關閉電子設備（這時身體開始製造褪黑激素）
- 設定比平時更早的就寢時間，在天黑後不久就上床休息。

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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.

Smart Naps. If you find naps beneficial, try to keep them to 20-30 minutes. This will typically improve alertness without leaving you groggy or affecting your nighttime sleep.

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 between 67 and 68 degrees.
- Avoiding afternoon caffeine. Exercising regularly for a rest well-earned.

近期的睡眠研究顯示，僅需遵循上述方法2至3天，我們就能有效重設生理時鐘。一旦完成自然重啟之後，還有許多其他行為改變可以幫助你維持更規律、更加安穩的睡眠。

利用時間小憩

如果你覺得小憩有幫助，請控制在20至30分鐘內。這樣能提升警覺性，同時不會讓你醒來後昏昏沉沉，或影響晚上的睡眠。

睡不著就起床

如果你躺在床上超過20分鐘仍無法入睡，不妨起身做些放鬆的事，例如冥想或喝杯無咖啡因的茶。但記住——不要使用電子產品。

就寢的黃金習慣

有時候，良好的睡眠需要一些準備工作，包括：

- 使用白噪音機或風扇來隔絕環境噪音
- 將房間溫度保持在華氏67-78度之間
- 避免下午攝取咖啡因；規律運動，讓身體真正值得一覺好眠。