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Charging Your Circadian Rhythm Superpower

Nothing is better than starting each day well-rested. Feeling rested can help you better tackle your patients' needs for the day, but that can seem easier said than done. That's why it's important to help calibrate your circadian rhythm to help your body find its groove. One trick to doing that is to match your light exposure to the time of day.

Your Morning Routine

We've all heard about the dangers of blue light, but did you know that sometimes you actually need it? Early morning sunlight has a lot of natural blue light in it, and it serves an important function to trigger a healthy release of cortisol in your brain. While you may think of it as a negative, cortisol is important to drive the part of your circadian rhythm that promotes wakefulness and alertness.

That early morning release of cortisol also starts a clock, telling your body to start releasing melatonin 12 hours later. If you don't get any blue light exposure in the morning, these signals get disrupted.

Your plan: Get some sunlight within an hour or two of waking. And outside is best because modern windows filter some of the benefits. Try pairing it with a quick morning walk before you go to work.

Your Evening Routine

Over millions of years, the human brain has evolved to notice changes in sunlight color. That means when the sun starts to set and the light turns more reddish, it provides a second anchor point for your circadian rhythm. That starts to switch on the melatonin signal, dampens the cortisol signal, and prepares you for the onset of evening, sleepiness, and ultimately sleep.

Your plan: Go back outside around sunset and enjoy those reddish colors. You might even try a little meditation session to start winding down from work and the other pressures of your day.

Your Nighttime Routine

For most of human history, light after sunset was dim, if there was any at all. But now we've got plenty of artificial light and devices flooding our nights with light. This light confuses your brain with competing signals — nighttime should be dark. So being mindful that nighttime light settles the brain and encourages the natural transition into sleep.

Your plan: Dim the lights in your house in the evening and pick a cutoff time for your devices. For quality sleep, turn off the smartphones, invest in some quality blackout curtains, and even cover lights on things like alarm clocks.