

Fact Sheet from the Center for Environmental Therapeutics at cet.org

## **How to Tame Your Circadian Rhythms on a Budget: Free, or Low-Cost, Ways to Get Your Life in Sync with Nature**

Are you a student pulling an all-nighter to study for an exam, or a business executive earning frequent flyer miles a bit too frequently, or a nurse, or bartender, working nights?



If so, your circadian rhythms take a beating. It's an assault much earlier generations never faced: Cave men and women did not set the alarm clock to get up early to hunt bears, or suffer with graveyard shifts. Even our grandparents and great-grandparents usually enjoyed a life in tune with sunrises, and sunsets.

But that was then, and this is now. When your lifestyle leaves you tired when you need to get up, and wide awake when you want to go to sleep, what can you do? And how can you do it on a budget?

These suggestions, supported by research, show that often the best things in life are free.

- Regularize your sleep/wake cycle by going to bed and getting up at the same time. Try to avoid sleeping late on your days off, because that will throw off your circadian rhythms. Circadian rhythms, like our prehistoric ancestors, never heard the term "weekend."
- Go outside for half an hour as soon as you get up (unless it's raining), so that the natural light will help keep your circadian rhythms in place. Almost everyone's cycle differs from 24 hours, usually somewhat longer, but sometimes also shorter.

Natural sunlight (or light designed to simulate it for the purpose of therapy) will help your body keep to the 24-hour cycle. Just don't close your eyes when you're outside, because the light has to reach the retina to work, and you want full benefit. Interestingly, the light activates cells that are not responsible for vision when it activates the circadian clock.

- If you want to use the computer, install [f.lux](#). Flu.x is a free program that changes the light quality on your screen for day vs. evening and night, so that it protects your eyes in the evening from activating stimulation (the blue part of the spectrum that makes up white light). It gives you bright light in the morning, when you want to be alert, and warmer light, like the illumination from indoor lighting, at night.
- If you (or your children) often get up in the middle of the night, consider a light night that removes the blue spectrum, such as the one CET tested and recommends. This research-based, amber-colored [night light](#) lets people get back to sleep easily.
- Don't exercise, eat a hearty meal, or go bungee jumping within an hour of going to bed. These are all activities that tell your body to stay awake, when you really want to let your body know bed-time is coming up.
- If these tips are not enough, look at [Reset Your Inner Clock: The Drug-Free Way to Your Best-Ever Sleep, Mood, and Energy](#). This book explains the challenges people face across the lifespan to get their lives in sync with their circadian rhythms, and offers practical suggestions for people of different ages.

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